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DOCTORS' WIVES

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HENRY AND SYLVIA LIEFERANT

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BOSTON 1930

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TO THE MEMORY OF A. S.

for his faith, his encouragement, and the stern idealism he bequeathed to both of us this book is dedicated

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BOOK ONE

CONCEPTION

I

With the desecrated book in his hand, and a nausea of anger in his heart, Doctor Mark Wyndram started upstairs toward the front bedroom, which, in spite of everything, he still shared with his wife. He had not heard her come in, he reflected, but then one never heard Julia unless, for sufficient reason, she wanted her presence known. Entering or leaving, preparing a meal, or even quarreling, she could be as noiseless as an electric current, so long as that noiselessness suited her own ends.

Julia was there, preparing for bed. She did not turn when he entered. Indeed she rarely turned for anybody — anything — except for herself, her own shrewd desires. If Wyndram thought of her at all now, he saw her only as a dark being, molded around a dark, hollow core of smiling indifference; a dark woman, cast as statues are cast, in an empty form. And under the surface sculpture, within the hollow mold, lay nothing for him but indifference. In all her hard slimness, in all her firm, mature slimness, she sat sidewise before the dressing table, legs crossed, body bent in the act of taking off her shoes. While he hesitated, painfully conscious of his own labored breath, her arm darted down toward the gilded slipper like a white serpent, fang-tipped by those long, quick, white fingers. Swiftly the fangs gouged button from buttonhole. Three on one slipper. One — two — three. Three on the other. One — two — three. Fascinated for the moment by the rhythm of her

movements, Wyndram forgot the object of his mission. It was only because she continued to ignore him that resentment flared anew with the return of his breath. Funny how hard it was for him to climb stairs these days.

He thrust the book almost under her nose.

"Who stuck pins into this volume of Maupassant?" he demanded. "I just paid a hundred and seventy-five for the set in leather. And somebody's used it for a pincushion."

She may have shrugged. If she did, Wyndram caught only a suggestion, a fleeting impression, a quiver of the shoulder through the silly black georgette negligee. Still she did not look up. Not so much as a glance from the corner of her eye, either toward the book bristling with pins or to the man crucified by the violation. And yet she knew that each sharp point in that fine leather binding was a thorn prick in his side, for *he* was identified with that book, with any book, and he lived in his books. And he knew she had done this to bring him to her in anger, since she could not bring him in that other way any more. She may have shrugged because, in that dark, unsmiling mold, she enjoyed his agony.

"Nina — perhaps," she said dryly, and still she did not look up. She was busy with her stockings now, rippling them down, easing the heels so she would not tear them. Then grasping the left toe she drew the stocking off and swung it out in a jagged semicircle before she hung it over the back of the chair on which she sat, as if that flesh-colored cobweb, still retaining the lifelike form of her leg, were a sort of garland, a pennant to be waved from a turret window. She seemed to him to be unnecessarily ostentatious about it.

"I knew you'd say that," he returned.

"Then why ask?"

"Because that isn't the truth. Nina loves books too much to — to — damn it! To mutilate them this way. Pins in a leather binding!"

"Oh, you and your daughter! And your books!" One might have judged she had had no physical partnership in that daughter. Off came the other stocking. Then she looked up, not with her head and her body, the way a woman does when she wants to face a situation, but only with her eyes. Behind them lurked that sardonic expression which functioned in her reactions as a smile would for another.

"Pins — in a book," he murmured.

"Well? Yes. Pins in a book. Nina oughtn't to be turned loose in your library. They sent for me from high school last week because they caught her with a copy of — something or other she shouldn't have."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't go."

"You didn't go, when her teachers sent for you?"

"She got out of it herself. Say — I was making my own way at seventeen."

"Which has nothing to do with the case. I won't have her reading censored by a lot of strangers. Do you hear me, Julia?" he cried, raising his voice for the first time. But the fury that almost strangled him was after all merely a transferred emotion. He was introspective enough to see this. No — he was not going to let her confound him with an irrelevant issue.

"Nina didn't do this," insisted Wyndram. "You did."

"Mrs. Coles was here to-day, to give me a fitting."

"And out of ten rooms you had to choose my office?"

"There's a good mirror there."

"I've told you a thousand times to have it brought up here, or anywhere. That's my place of business."

"Other things going on there besides business, I guess."

A sense of frustration kept him doggedly on the subject. Convinced from the start that she was at the bottom of this act of vandalism, nevertheless he wanted her admission.

"You did it," he repeated.

Unexpectedly she answered, "Yes, I did. A hundred and seventy-five for books!"

Further argument seemed useless now. Wearily he lowered himself into an armchair, and spreading his feet far apart, as old men often do, he began to remove the pins. His fingers, though short and almost spatulate, possessed hidden mechanism for the release of tenderness and sensitivity, and employing both, he now proceeded to remove the darts. They might have been stitches in a wound, so carefully, so gently, so lovingly he handled them, that no scars might be left on the leather. Of the scars on his soul he took little notice.

He hated Julia, sitting there with her white body peering out from behind the black veil, and her white arms coiled around her hair while she too removed pins — hairpins. The idea came to him that he ought to thrust back into her flesh those he had just dislodged from the book.

"I must be getting like her," he thought, "to dream of such a thing."

He found himself counting the darts. Fourteen — fifteen — sixteen. More than the incident, Julia's motives irritated him. He understood. In that hollow mold obscure passions raged. Primal lust. That which had made his an-

cestors hang witches, and hers (she was part Spanish) conceive of an Inquisition. The urge of the savage to pierce the enemy's effigy with spears.

Twenty-three — twenty-four — twenty-five. And this book was, to her, the effigy of her husband, of her enemy. She meant to kill him by proxy, because she was primal. Oh, well! He was forty-eight and she thirty-eight. He supposed all couples drifted so, when only the flesh united them, or, as in their case, when the flesh had withered between them.

He said aloud, "I'm going to keep the office and reception room locked."

She had been speculating on what she might have bought for the money, and answered, "That'll be just fine for all the nice little women who visit you three times a week, won't it? They needn't be afraid I'll surprise them. Why — you can even keep one there for the night."

"That's such old stuff. I should think you'd be tired of it."

Under her breath she sang a snatch of a song, once popular with street evangelists: "The same old story, and yet 'tis ever new, tum, tum," she finished derisively.

"Shut up!"

"Women are fools. Fools! To get behind locked doors with you and then pay you for professional services. You take your pleasure when and where you please, I'll say. And, thank God, I still know how to take mine."

"Go ahead," he told her. She had always been jealous of his profession and the women who came with their secrets, fastening on him the infidelities of which he suspected her to be guilty. Argument led always into the same channels.

"No physician can afford to use his office for any other purpose but the proper one."

"*You* have," she shot back. "And you're safe. You and the rest, Calucci, and Holzmann and Bingle, cheap ambulance hounds, the whole crowd. Nothing's ever happened to you and nothing ever will, because women don't tell." She twisted her face into a vulgar grimace. "Phew — you smell of women. You reek of 'em. The minute you put a new suit on, the flavor sticks to it."

As a matter of routine, Julia had aired her views on the subject in the same phraseology once a week for at least fifteen years. Following the same routine Wyndram shrugged. That her seemingly violent outburst had little relative importance was evidenced by her next remark.

"Coming to bed?"

"No. I'm not feeling so well."

"Stomach again?"

"Yes." At the same time he made mental note to have his blood pressure looked into again the next day. His heart raced along madly, and instantaneous spells of vertigo had punctuated the evening.

Wyndram's answer seemed to goad Julia anew. "It's those damn Wop dinners you're stuffing into yourself at — whatever his name is."

"You ought to know it. Calucci's been coming here for ten years."

"Ten years too much, so far as I care. 'Eat, *Doctore* — eat!' " she mimicked, waving her hands in what she thought was an imitation of Calucci's gesture of hospitality. "And along comes another plate of wiggly spaghetti. 'Drink, *Doctore* — drink. *Vino*. Drink *vino!*' Some more of that damn red ink on the table. Eat, drink, drink, eat, from

three in the afternoon until three in the morning. Go ahead, kill yourself, just because you like the Wops."

"Calucci has more knowledge in his little finger — "

"Knowledge, knowledge! What's knowledge?"

"Pretty nearly all there is — in life."

"I suppose Holzmann, that crazy Dutchman, is smarter than the rest of the world, too? He's a fine one to have around, with Nina growing up."

"What's the sudden concern over the girl's companions?"

"I tell you I don't want to meet Holzmann's twenty-thousand-dollar wife. Though I could tell her a thing or two about him, and about being a doctor's wife. Oh, yes, I could!" she added, with evident enjoyment.

"Holzmann's life is none of your business. You don't know anything about his life. You haven't enough insight to understand him."

"Oh — understand — "

"You don't have to meet her, either. Nina and I can do the honors very well."

"Expect Bingle too?"

He nodded.

"That is, if he's not in jail," she amended.

"Jail? He doesn't do abortions."

"Not that. For doing a mastoid on somebody who needs a mustard plaster."

"That's only hearsay," he argued testily. "You don't know anything about it. I wish you'd keep out of things that don't concern you."

Mark Wyndram shared with the rest of his profession a certain *ésprit de corps,* incompatible with that devotion to veracity underlying scientific method. He resented criti-

cism by the uninitiate of one within the sacred circle. Actually he wasted no love on this Doctor John Bingle, but Bingle was a graduate of a recognized medical college. Let the layman, however intelligent or informed, even hint at imperfection of the physician, and immediately the professional back humps, the professional tail swells, the professional spittle hisses out with the contemptuous answer, "You don't understand."

A sudden surge of ribaldry, as if a door had been opened on a party of merry-makers and then immediately closed, reminded Wyndram, with something of a shock, that the world still drifted around them. Their quarrels generated some centrifugal force which twirled them back into themselves. They were like two castaways in an open boat, no sign of human habitation at hand, each striving savagely to devour the other, himself to survive.

And now he heard voices close at hand, in the street. He went over to the window to make sure that his runabout stood at the curb, in anticipation of night calls. He had wished now that it had been stolen, that it would be stolen. To him it was the regimental insignia of the rank and file of medical service, from which after twenty-two years he had not lifted himself. The symbol of hustle, of stagnation, of the whole life of the general practitioner who still seizes his bag at every call and runs out of the front door with one arm in the sleeve and the rest of the coat trailing after him.

"Servant of the public," he thought. "So noble and romantic in the beginning. Call from an unknown — dirty side street — dash down — save mother and babe — refuse fee with grand gesture because husband is out of a job. Rot!"

A taxi swirled round the corner and jerked to a halt before a house over the way, to which Wyndram had once been summoned on a bad case of bootleg poisoning. In a street of brownstone dwellings, his was the only one not yet converted into the sort of house where a furnished room to let is called a vacancy, and where women pay exorbitant rentals for the privilege of entertaining in their rooms. He watched the two figures disappear behind the etched glass doors, and for a moment conjured up a picture, an animated picture, of that couple passing through the hall carpeted in red, of the woman preceding the man up the red stairs —

When he turned back, Julia lay in bed, not quite asleep, judging by the slight tension evident about the mouth. Flat on her back, with hands clasped behind her head, in a position which brought out the sensuous expectancy of her figure, she might have been a vase; her arms — the handles; the curve over the breast and the constriction at the waist — the neck; and the voluptuous swell of the hips tapering to the feet — the body. A hollow vase into which life had poured much but from which thus far had come nothing.

Though she no longer cared whether he came to bed or sat reading all night, it was her habit to lie in this suspended state until he stretched out beside her. He undressed quietly now, darkened the room, and also from habit, slipped in beside her without disturbing the covers. Quite accidentally his foot touched hers. She stirred, and then much to his surprise whined, "Oh, Mark. Oh — oh — " And her voice trailed off into a sharp breath, as if he had hurt her.

"All right, Julia," he said mechanically, though even

while he formed the words, he knew there was no pain in her wail.

He remembered the time when that tremulous whine could draw a white filament of desire through his veins. In his blood he remembered how he quivered with the resistance in her voice, until her protest, provoking him, made of each fulfillment a new conquest. The white flesh of her rushed into sensual experience, while the dark core of her craved subjection, and cunningly wailed aloud in pretended alarm. In the body stream rather than with the brain he recalled the insistent protest, pulsating off into the night like the call of a young owl, rising to a weird cadence, sinking to a pathetic sob.

"Oh, Mark. Oh — oh — "

Always he had had to approach her with emotional banners flying for the battle. He was never sure but that her protest would blossom into insistent summons. Always he was faced with new conquest where only a short time before he had already been victor. And now, although the need for the red magic of her wail had long since disappeared, she too clung to the subconscious memory of it. The touch of his foot had brought into play the old mechanism.

"All right, Julia," he said again, not without a certain gentleness.

II

To Nina Wyndram, at seventeen, as at seven, her school life was merely a little island in, yet apart from, the stream of daily existence. Though not entirely the fault of the educational system, this state of affairs had nevertheless been emphasized by unfortunate contacts with too many conservative teachers of the type who still believe it mortal weakness to coördinate the printed word with the routine of life. Certainly, in that year following the armistice, there was a strong tendency toward vitalization of the schools. It had been the girl's fate to have escaped the influence of the few pioneers working in New York City.

A teacher of mathematics in the public high school which Nina attended had but recently caught her reading Rabelais during the recitation. Instead of being overcome by her double iniquity, first in ignoring the Regents' review then in progress, second in substituting for it the writings of "some dirty French priest", the girl was merely outraged at the censorship. Among the adults of her home circle, no such prohibition was known or even understood. Her answer, labeled "insubordination" on the lemon-colored card in the permanent records of the school, should have been indicative of this mutual exclusion.

"There isn't any use in sending for my mother," she assured the disciplinarian to whom she was remanded for sentence, "because every book I read comes from my

father's library. He knows I'm reading this. Why shouldn't I?"

"I don't believe your father knows. This is an immoral book."

"Why?" was her counter-demand.

School and Nina had merely failed each other. Perhaps this was it. A few hundred amœbas, imprisoned together in a single drop of water, receive a dozen primeval manifestations of contiguous life. A million of them cast into a vast ocean may never encounter signs of animal activity. In her own little drop of water, which her father dominated, Nina felt that sense of teeming life. In the vaster sea of a school of five thousand girls, she knew no such response, except upon rare occasions, during literature or biology. Then she reached out with the fluid substance of her being, drawing back into herself such knowledge and experience as the inner protoplasm demanded to satisfy its eternal hunger.

At the same time, there was about curly-headed Nina Wyndram a look already at variance with conjugations, notes to excuse absence, and report cards. It was the sort of hidden lusciousness which will make a man gazing at a slumbering tree in February say with excitement, "See, it's spring!" Maturity stirring lightly as yet within the soft form of the girl was nevertheless revealing itself, perhaps not in the childish cheeks and flat wrists, but in the quickening of a firm whiteness akin to her mother's.

Coming home one afternoon in early March, with school events of the day long since relegated to exile, Nina encountered Mary, the Wyndram maid, at the head of the brownstone steps, polishing, of all things, the brass boot-scraper on a rainy day. Long silver daggers of rain

pierced the air, converting drifts of the morning's snowfall into treacherous dirty slush. Intermittent gusts of wind were sucked down the street from the Hudson into Central Park. At intervals wisps of fog floated in midair, temporarily coating the old decaying houses with a fine layer of gray mold. Nina's umbrella dripped with the regularity of a leaking vessel. In walking from the Seventy-second Street subway station she had trailed a good share of mud with her. Soon patients would begin straggling in to wait for office hours. But Mary had to polish the brass boot-scraper on such a day! The cocoa mat inside had been cleaned, and also the tiled floor.

She turned her head to greet Nina, and with the one movement seemed to crouch lower against the stone, as if she were kneeling before some superior creature. Her face, shrunken and wrinkled and pale yellow, was small, like a dried yellow raisin. For the sixteen years that Nina could remember her, she had always been thus, neither older nor younger, eternally bending over some morsel of dirt, and seeming to shrink away when she walked. Affectionate impatience sharpened Nina's words.

"What are you doing that for to-day, Mary!"

"You go right ahead inside, Miss Nina. Don't mind about me, Miss Nina."

"But you'll have to do it all over again when the rain stops."

"Yes, Miss Nina. I know. But I don't mind doing it, Miss Nina."

"Then — " The girl halted in her argument. The funny part of it was that Mary did enjoy doing things over and over again. Nina dug down into the pocket of her raincoat. "Have some candy, Mary?" she said, casually so

that the woman would not know she had bought it on purpose to give to her. Mary scolded when she thought Nina spent money that way. But if the candy were left over from the girl's lunch, the other ate it with relish.

"Oh, yes, Miss Nina," panted Mary, eager, yet humbled by the favor. "Thank you, Miss Nina. Only you give it to me. My hands — with this polish. No — no — Miss Nina, not so much. Oh — the whole bag! Oh — no!"

"I've had enough. Honestly, Mary. You know Dad says I mustn't eat too many sweets."

"Oh, Miss Nina. Caramels. I do love caramels best of all. Don't you? When I worked in the Van Wert School the young ladies used to give me these for carrying notes to town. They did have a lot of fun, those young ladies. And they knew I liked caramels." She passed the back of her hand under her nose and sniffed deeply. "One time, that was when I worked for the Spanish Consul, Miss Nina — but hear how I do carry on. There's two gentlemen in the parlor and Doctor isn't in. Mrs. Wyndram neither. The Eyetalian doctor and your uncle."

Nina was shaking the water from her umbrella and watching the rivulet thus created in its cascade down the steps. She raised her head sharply at this bit of information.

"My uncle? You mean Uncle Thomas?" she questioned, hunching her shoulders and catching her underlip between her teeth in roguish expression of delight.

Mary, from her lowly position on the wet stone, answered, "It's his hand, Miss Nina. He's hurt it quite bad. He told me himself — it's very bad."

A rush of sympathy crowded out personal delight. "Oh! Poor Uncle Thomas. Something's always happening to

him," she said, in a low voice throaty with tenderness, and fuller than might be expected from a young girl.

In the dim narrow hall, Nina hastily divested herself of raincoat and rubbers, and pooled them in a jumble with her hat, books, umbrella, purse and newspaper on the hall bench. By this time she had worked herself into a fever of anticipation. She had left her wet wraps outside only in deference to Uncle Thomas. Except for his presence, she would have marched in, dripping. Mary had spoiled her. But she had an idea that Uncle Thomas, with his exact ways, would resent all this mess. And Uncle Thomas was wonderful. Despite the admiration she gave her father, the girl considered his brother Thomas the very paragon of learning. He knew everything, simply everything, and everybody. The names in the headlines; the people in the smaller paragraphs at the foot of the column; the ones in "among those present"; in "Who's Who"; and even those who were not yet, but some day would be, celebrities. And he could talk as no other talking human could. Carven words dropped from his lips, arranging themselves into gracious sentences that stood out from the background of conversation as sharply as figures in relief. With such thoughts exciting her, Nina rushed down the long, narrow room — everything in the house was narrow — to the other one nearer her father's office, where the two men were sitting.

It may have been Nina's latent intention to rush headlong upon them in childish fashion, but before she reached the spot, she began to hang back shyly. Neither man noticed her at first. Thomas Wyndram, short, stocky, a professorial pallor in his face, sat stiffly with both knees

pressed close to each other in that attitude of the timid student. The other, the big Latin, lounged, indeed almost sprawled in his chair, his head tilted back, as if in this position he could draw greater draughts of enjoyment from life. To Nina, neither of these creatures was a man, but rather an abstraction of some vague ideal which she called spiritual beauty. It was her credo. Mere affection was something to be shunned. She felt obligated to justify any attraction she felt for another by some explanation deeper than just, "I like him." In discussing certain people with her father she often said she enjoyed them for their spiritual beauty. The truth was she read spiritual beauty into them because she liked them. Warm, alive with enormous curiosity, the girl naturally expanded before companion warmth; and cherishing an ideal of perfection, as youth will, she endowed these adults with her own notion of perfection, the thing she called spiritual beauty.

Doctor Antonio Calucci had been her father's friend for ten years. Her uncle, professor of English literature in a college in the city, was a lifelong friend. She had many reasons, and not all childish, for wanting their company. None of them seemed legitimate to her. She had to believe that both men possessed beautiful souls. Even a situation in which she found herself must be motivated by that same incorporeal ideal, or it became intolerable.

With one accord now, the two men looked up, as if at the same instant they had sensed that approach of glistening youth, of the white, quickening tree trunk in which her spirit stirred. Calucci bounded to his feet. Only a short time before he would have drawn her to him, pinched her cheek, and crowed, "Nina *carissima!*" But now he swung his chair around for her to accept.

"Doctore — *bambina* grow two inch — eh?" he said to Thomas Wyndram, holding his hand about a foot above her head in measurement. Her blonde curls, clustered by dampness, exuded an odd perfume which Calucci, in passing, compared to the fragrance of grapes on the vine after a rain.

The professor, examining a tremendous bandage on the thumb of his right hand, continued with his own thought. "And is it your opinion, Doctor Calucci, that the solution you have employed is sufficient tonic for the impulse toward regeneration of tissue?"

The other, having brought a third chair over, no longer lounged, but leaned forward, watching the professor's lips with intelligent though puzzled attention. "Solution? *Si* — *si*. But what you say — pulse? Pulse?"

Thomas repeated his remark, gouging out the words neatly, crisply, as a thrifty housewife might gouge out the eyes of a potato. They rang in Nina's ears with the musical staccato of pearls dropping into a silver cup. Calucci strained every muscle. He might almost have had organs of hearing in his shoulders, so tautly were they set during the repetition. Then he made a sound of impatience — impatience at himself, not at his dear friend's brother. He gestured broadly to acknowledge defeat.

"What's this in Italian, Doctore?"

Very much against his principles, Uncle Thomas translated the question fluently though not with greater simplicity into the language Calucci understood.

"Oh — oh, yes. Fine. Great stuff. In twenty-four hour all heal up. Oh, yes — yes."

"What? Healed in twenty-four hours? My dear man, you astonish me by your optimism. A wound of this nature

healed in twenty-four hours! Are you not mistaken, Doctor Calucci?"

"Is it so bad, Uncle Thomas?" put in Nina seriously.

"Let me tell you, dear child. This will be of the utmost scientific interest to *you,* Doctor Calucci."

"I attend, Professor."

Nina drew closer, disturbing the equilibrium of personalities. Again her fresh glistening youth shed a radiance over the room, the clean gleam of her youth that was not merely a result of fine grooming, short hair and the exposure of slender throat or of corsetless figure. It was the vitality within the smooth, tinted skin, the passion in her eyes, so curiously black against the yellow curls. A curtain might have been drawn to admit a shade more light, that was all. Not without reason, Thomas Wyndram, the student, thought of a group of girls he had watched bathing on an island in the Mediterranean. Nina's youth clung to her with the shining sleekness of wet clothing. The other man, the Latin, the hot-blooded one, extended his hand to rumple her hair. Hardly of his own volition, he curbed the desire. The bud must not be touched lest the flower within come forth scarred.

"*Bambina* — grow fast, eh?" he said once more, partly through paucity of vocabulary, partly through failure to characterize the change.

" 'The child is father to the man,' " quoted the professor.

"Father? You say Nina's father?" cried Calucci, wheeling around.

"No, no," pronounced the other gesturing. "I said, 'The child is father to the man.' "

"He means that you can tell how I'm going to look in

five years by the way I look now," explained Nina. If she went to Italy, she would not understand very much either, she reflected.

"Oh. *Si* — *si*. In five year you look not like Father, like the Mother, hm?"

But Thomas Wyndram, Ph.D., LL.B., professor of English, book reviewer, author of an authoritative work on the art of pen-and-ink sketching, which was his hobby, this man had a story to tell about himself and his thumb, and interruption only made him more patiently determined to spin it. He held the bandaged member up, as a teacher exhibits a model for demonstration.

"It began two days ago, precisely at this very hour, five-thirty. Returning to my rooms to dress for early dinner and a subsequent meeting at the National Arts Club, I had not the slightest suspicion of the accident about to befall me. I filled the bath, spread out my dress suit, remarked that the landlady's boy had failed to clean my patent leathers, for which service I had already paid him the sum of ten cents in advance, and then finally opened the laundry package wherein I wished to find a tucked shirt of which I am particularly fond.

"I shall spare you the details of my bath," he went on in this steady stream. "Suffice it to say that when I reached that stage of my dressing where I found it necessary to remove the pins from the shirt and for what obscure reason these washerwomen needs must use such deadly weapons I cannot say — I *scratched* myself."

Nina drew a sharp breath, having already identified herself with the speaker. Doctor Calucci grunted.

"Yes, my dear child," nodded Professor Wyndram.

"The sudden pain of a pin scratch is indeed keen. I must admit, strong as I am, that a sound similar to the one you have just uttered escaped me. But — thinking nothing of the injury, I merely bathed it in witch hazel, applied iodine, and before leaving the house sealed the wound with a strip of plaster. I believe I have that roll of plaster here in my pocket. You must have a look at it, Doctor. It is prepared in some new way devised by my friend Farney, the chemist." While searching his pockets, he grazed the sore thumb and winced politely. "You see how tender it is. Ah — here's the plaster."

Calucci, displaying that patient interest at the command of those who habitually meet people in their weaker moments, took the little tin spool and held it to his nose for identification. He was still waiting for the promised scientific disclosure. The other picked up the thread of the story. A stranger might have thought he had written it out first and studied it by rote.

"Well — what more need I say? Imagine my consternation when, after the meeting, during an informal game of chess with my friend Senator Hartfield, I became conscious of a distinct throb beneath the spot which I had scratched. I lifted a corner of the plaster. The thumb was tender to the touch. No further examination was necessary. I perceived that inflammation had set in. Inflammation is a dreadful thing.

"I excused myself hastily and rushed off to my rooms. At intervals of a half-hour I bathed the finger in carbolic. Between these treatments I applied hot water. The landlady, whom I aroused in case I should need assistance, advised the use of butter. I borrowed an ounce from her. I wonder if you know how I suffered. Then, just before I

fell asleep with exhaustion, I took a physic. The proper thing to do — was it not, Doctor Calucci?"

The younger man crossed and recrossed his legs. "Oh — no harm," he answered.

Nina, to whom cold-blooded talk on a variety of personal subjects seemed not at all unusual, scarcely noted the interruption.

"I took a physic," he resumed. "Late this afternoon, I decided to change the bandage on my thumb. Perhaps, in my impatience to discover what progress had been made by way of improvement, I was not over-gentle. The finger began to bleed. My dear child, my dear Doctor Calucci, it bled — and it bled — bled — "

Mark Wyndram came home to find Mary setting Nina's wraps in order. She was disposing of them in, and around, and above that one-time family institution, the hall bench. Simultaneously, in her own inarticulate fashion, she gave thanks to God for the privilege of handling the girl's possessions. How lucky she was to have worked for such a fine family so many years; and a doctor too. She had always been lucky that way, working for people who were good to her. Nina's hat went up on one of the small brass hooks clustered about the diamond-shaped mirror. The coat belonged toward the edge of the high back, on a very large brass hook, branched like an elk's antlers. The arms of the bench embraced Chinese lacquered umbrella stands. The seat itself enclosed a zinc-lined repository for rubbers, skates, and such old possessions as had no definite niches.

Without really detesting the piece of furniture, Doctor Wyndram might long ago have replaced it. It had come with the house at its purchase from a retiring physician.

"Good enough for your kind of patients to hang their things on," Julia said, every time he suggested a change. And since no matter of household management was ever of extreme importance to him, he had continued to let her spend the allotted money for other articles, more desired by her.

"Mr. Thomas is waiting, Doctor," panted Mary. "He's hurt his finger — that bad, to hear him tell of it. He told me so himself."

For Mary, there was no recounting of events in ordinary voice. She had no ordinary voice. If she spoke at all, her manner was that of a runner just back from the front with the latest news. The arrival of the ice man was news, or the arrival of Mr. Thomas, all news to be repeated breathlessly.

" — and it bled — and bled — " the professor was saying inside.

"What bled?" asked Wyndram from the doorway.

Three pairs of eyes lifted. They had been unaware of his return.

"My thumb, of course," explained the other without preliminary greeting. "But for Doctor Calucci, you might have found me in a *pool* of blood."

"Thanks, Tonio," said Wyndram, joining the group.

Both Calucci and Nina rose. He took the man's chair and dropped into it with a sigh. Nina nestled her cheek against his and murmured:

"Poor busy Dad. You're all tired out."

Awkwardly and brusquely he returned her caress. Though the elder by only six years, Mark Wyndram appeared that day to be some ten or twelve years his brother's senior. His hair, once crayon-black and thick, had turned

completely white in the thinning, and although he was taller, with none of Thomas' stockiness, he showed a certain inflexibility of muscle which emphasized the impression of age. Except for his eyes. And his eyes were the youngest in the room. Black, fiery, glowing with the steady fire of mental energy, they dominated his face. Some day Nina would have his eyes.

"Well — " began Wyndram.

Thomas interrupted. "Doctor Calucci put no medication to the wound. I was of the opinion that wet compresses — "

"You don't know a damn thing about it," his brother told him. "As it is, you've got the thumb done up like a gouty toe in the funny sheet. I suppose you wanted it that way."

In a fine bass, a little too pointedly loud, Calucci was singing. "Tra — la — la, la — la — la. Tra la la — la — la — la. Tra — "

Wyndram understood. The damage was not serious.

"I directed Doctor Calucci to bandage it well."

Nina thought, "Dad can be so cruel sometimes. I suppose if he sympathized with everybody — "

"Put these in the drawer, Baby, will you," said Wyndram, handing her a carelessly compressed wad of paper money.

"Oh — money, Doctore!"

"What good is it, Tonio?"

"Oh — fine, good! *Bambina* wear fine dress. *Signora* wife fine dress, have automobile, see opera, Doctore buy himself — buy — *apparatus criticus*. Professor, you know everything — " to Thomas.

"Doesn't he?" echoed Nina, back again.

"— tell me how you say in English — apparatus criticus."

"You mean reference books."

"Oh — reference books. Be more smart, Doctore. Money fine. Doctore — what's difference between old doctor and young doctor?" Calucci was striking his own jolly stride now. "Like this. This morning my cousin come to me. He is young doctor in hospital. He blush because patient give him two dollar. Good joke, eh? Young doctor get red if patient pay. Old doctor get red if patient don't pay. Whew — red like hot pepper — "

Thomas had to leave. The two brothers walked to the door together. In the hall, the younger remarked rather peevishly:

"That man has been here ten years. Can you not teach him the English language?"

"He's a fine diagnostician."

"Is that, then, the aim of existence?"

"No more than the perfect rendition of the English language is. Why the devil don't you buy yourself a new hat?"

"Not just now, Mark. Not just now."

"That old hat — "

"This is an Austrian velours and guaranteed to last for years." Thomas felt injured.

"Then get it cleaned or something. Every time you come here you make me feel as if I ought to dig down into my pocket and give you five dollars."

"This is a very fine hat. Indeed — I bought it in Vienna."

After Thomas left, Wyndram stood thinking for a moment. In the estimation of each brother, the other had

made a mess of life. Mark, at least, was willing to admit it with certain reservations. The Professor refused to entertain any such preposterous notion. Calucci was alone when Wyndram returned. The two men exchanged a long look. Then together they started toward the back room, the doctor's office. Calucci tugged at the stethoscope in his coat pocket.

Later Julia swept in, in time for dinner. She wore magnificent furs and a feathered hat in perfect taste. Nina darted downstairs to meet her.

"Nina," cried her mother sharply. "You're tearing these feathers to pieces."

"I just wanted to hug you, Mother," the girl apologized. "You look so gorgeous."

III

Mark Wyndram was condemned. One Saturday night in April, shortly before Easter, he had a hemorrhage at midnight, and Nina, the only other member of the household at home, was with him in the library. All evening Doctor Wyndram had complained of nausea, ascribing it, verbally at least, to the stuffiness of the atmosphere. At first the girl took her father's diagnosis at face value. The room was, in fact, poorly ventilated, and through the years Nina had known her father to consult several engineers on the possibility of correcting the defect at reasonable expenditure. Situated on the street level, between the dining room in front, and the kitchen at the rear, the library drew breath either through these rooms, or by way of a tiny air-shaft window.

Always responsive to the moods of those close to her, Nina at length became restless with his growing restlessness, discarding book after book as her father was doing, roaming aimlessly into the adjoining rooms or out into the hall, only to turn sharply and rush back into his presence, some shapeless fear quickening her steps.

"Poor Dad's not feeling so well," she comforted.

"I'm all right, Baby. It's just — I don't know. Better go to bed."

"Want to sit before an open window?"

"No, child. Don't bother about me."

Nina was really frightened. With scarce any idea of

what she might find, she kept stealing sidewise glances at his face, gray earlier in the evening, but now blotched by a dull, disastrous red. Julia Wyndram had gone out with a group of vague individuals to whom she alluded as "my friends." Nina pretended to be waiting up for her mother, and despite her father's urging, refused flatly to go to bed. She looked for no words to explain her alarm. Sentinel-like, tragedy measured off its paces, marching closer, closer. The girl heard alien footsteps and that was enough.

Wyndram sat at the table, his whole weight braced on his elbows. Once, when Nina raised her eyes for a surreptitious glance, she caught him in the secret act of scrutinizing her face. The look out of his burning eyes made the girl wish that Mary had not left to visit a married niece in Astoria. She had a puzzled feeling that she would be sorry if she let him out of her sight.

"Nearly twelve, Nina. Go up."

"There's no school to-morrow," she pouted, with deliberate over-emphasis.

Wyndram, in order to spare her the shock as well the responsibility, summoned the residue of energy in both brain and body for one last coherent effort.

"It's my blood pressure, and arteries, and all that goes with it. Get an ice bag for my heart, Baby. Quick!"

Sentinel-like, tragedy measured off its paces, and the instant of challenge came while Nina was upstairs. Returning, she blamed herself for having left him, even at his command. She was frantic, and ill herself at the sight, and provoked at being ill, and above all, helpless in the situation. She telephoned Calucci, Holzmann, Bingle. Not one was home. She called a few others she knew only by

name. Some gigantic conspiracy deprived her father of immediate medical aid.

"He's always home when *he* gets a night call," she said angrily. "Why doesn't Mama come, or somebody?"

Wyndram lay on the couch, having staggered toward it after Nina flew upstairs for the ice bag. He was in a state of complete collapse, cheeks hollow, eyes closed and sunk in their sockets, the movement of his breast imperceptible. Then Nina remembered about the ice bag, which she still clutched. She was afraid to pass through the room, her father was so curiously still and relaxed. She walked out into the hall through the dining room and entered the kitchen by the other door. For many years after, the brittle sound of ice being chopped from the cake conjured out of Nina's memory the details of that night. The girl kept a resemblance of courage through the next two hours by standing at the front window and pretending that every automobile she heard brought relief. This one didn't stop. Well — the next one, then. Oh — that's pulling up across the street. No matter. Here comes another. Perhaps she'd better try Doctor Bingle again, or one of them.

At two o'clock Calucci answered the call in person.

"I expect this any day," he said to Nina.

Otto Holzmann followed within a few moments. By the time they had examined the unconscious man and administered a stimulant, Bingle arrived, brisk and big, enwrapped in his habitual bedside manner.

"Bad business, bad business," he muttered. And yet he had a way of talking under his breath so dramatically that he seemed to be shouting the news outside the big tent. "But we'll pull him out of it. Yes, sir. I'll see to that."

"Shut up," growled Holzmann. "Vot in hell do you

know about it? Ven all is done, you'll save him! Do something, instead of talk."

Bingle toyed with the gold caduceus on his watch fob, and his answer indicated that he had intended to do something right along — yes, sir, right along — from the instant his wife gave him Nina's message. Good old Wyndram. Not help him? Why, every shred of his attention belonged to that man. Professionally? Oh, no — no. As a matter of friendship. Yes, sir — friendship is a wonderful thing.

"Take this other end," growled Holzmann, and Bingle grasped the edges of the couch cover in such manner as to convince even the most hostile stranger that he meant to do so right along — yes, sir, right along.

Calucci, who had not spoken since the first few words to Nina, took the German's place at the foot. For the latter was unpleasantly thin, and though possessed of galvanic powers in the sick room, lacked sufficient strength to hold up his end of the improvised stretcher. Therefore the two big men carried their unconscious patient up two flights of stairs to the front bedroom, Nina leading the way. None of them had ever been above the parlor floor, even in the family living room adjoining this bedroom. Julia saw to it that Mark received his friends where he received his patients, the distinction being plain between his friends and hers. Nina opened the door and stood aside without daring to look at the inert form. She knew he was not dead, but she could not look at him, anyway.

"Where's your mother?" demanded Holzmann, coming up behind.

"I don't know," answered Nina, trembling at the implication.

The other produced a queer, surly noise of disgust. "In a family, everybody should know where everybody else is. Ven it comes to something like this — "

Nina stationed herself at the front door. The night was a vast, dim railroad terminal out of which hurried new arrivals. First a nurse, in the crisp habiliments of professional solicitude. Before she closed the door behind her, she had ordered the girl to bed. Nina did not go. Then came a small truck bringing oxygen tanks, in case of need. Two giants carried the cartridges upstairs, and they laughed and joked as if it were broad daylight, and then stood around, waiting for a tip.

"There you are," conceded Bingle, bestowing upon them, along with the quarter, a flourish worthy of one presenting the Congressional Medal. He had taken the coin from Calucci's coat pocket, having no small change himself, he said.

Then Mary returned from Astoria. Upon her customary haste was superimposed a new breathlessness. In her simple heart, she believed that the blaze of lights, visible in every window of the house from the corner at Broadway was intended as a rebuke for her lateness.

She hurried in. "Oh, Miss Nina. To think of you waiting up for me. You're so good to me, Miss Nina. My niece's husband — he's such a nice boy, Miss Nina — he told me about a new way to go, and when I came to the station, an old gentleman — oh! Miss Nina. Is something wrong? I said to myself, when I seen the lights — oh, there's men up in the front bedroom — "

"Mary, do you know where Mother went?"

"Your mother? Is it her?"

"My father is terribly sick, Mary."

"Oh, Miss Nina. Not your father. No — no — He's a good man, the doctor is," and she burst into tears.

Nina had reached that state where the sight of emotion in another must break her own reserve. Prompted by some newborn pride of maturity she controlled herself until sounds of Mary's activity drifted up from the kitchen. Then she too began to cry, with terrible long sobs which soon sank to the rhythm of hysteria. Thus Julia found her at four o'clock after midnight. She did not notice what Mary had seen from the corner. She did not even see Nina, at first. The hall was dimly lighted at all times, but now, after the glamour of the evening's entertainment, it seemed damned in darkness. About the figure of Julia Wyndram there still clung, like faint perfume, the admiring glances of men; as if these glances were tangible entities, and her dull white flesh a magic mirror which not only reflected but retained impressions. Gradually her eyes became adjusted to the dusk.

"Nina! That you?"

The girl did not look up. "Oh, Mother! I thought you'd never come," and fresh sobs tortured her nerves into renewed hysteria.

"Who's that in the kitchen?"

Nina listened for the hack — hack — hack — the tinkle of shattered fragments.

"Doctor Otto — chopping ice — "

"What for?" sharply.

"For Dad."

"God in Heaven!" breathed Julia passionately. Light, female footsteps tapped along the hall overhead. Julia lifted her face, which was momentarily sullied by the old habit of doubt. In that flash she caught sight of a starched,

white figure disappearing into the bathroom at the head of the stairs. "A nurse! God in Heaven," she repeated, then slowly and uncertainly made the sign of the cross. And as an afterthought, "Those damn Wop dinners!"

Nina, to whom her mother's Roman Catholic training was a myth, shrank away before this strange manifestation. "Mama," she whispered. "Mama."

Julia started and slipped off her wrap, emerging from its tinseled folds a different creature. Already some subtle force was at work within the woman whereby what little humanity was left to her would be given power to rise above the level of its own source. That faint perfume of conscious female power, that receptivity to the male power had vanished, not as yet to be replaced by another definite aura. Complete crystallization was to come later.

She drew Nina into her arms, and for the first time in many months, kissed her. The unexpected caress dulled the edge of the girl's grief. Wonder and love, admiration and awe, struggled for expression in her face.

"Poor Dad," she said tightening her embrace. This sense of intimate contact and potential sympathy brightened the world. "Poor Dad. You should have seen him, Mother. There isn't much beauty in seeing people sick, is there?"

"No, Lamb," comforted Julia.

"Remember when you always used to call me 'Lamb'; I was a tiny little thing, wasn't I?"

"Listen — there's a milkman. Up to bed, Nina."

"I'm afraid — alone."

"I'll come to sleep with you."

"Right in my own bed? With me? Honest, Mother?

Will you? Did you ever sleep with me before? I don't remember at all. Let's go right up. I'm tired."

Arm in arm, two figures mounted the stairs, but only one shadow crept beside them, one spreading shadow fused from two by a flaming moment of unwonted emotion. Nina went up to the third floor, there to lie awake in anticipation. She was a little animal, wanting another of her kind to snuggle up against.

Julia did not think of sleep until after a day nurse came on duty at seven in the morning. The house became a one-patient sanitarium, where thought as well as act centered around the silent sick man. During the next week, while Wyndram lay in this curious state of apathy, friends and relatives who came to inquire for him saw proof of hitherto unsuspected accomplishment in Julia. She possessed a talent fairly common in the better class courtesan of the Old World, but quite unknown except as a rarity even among devoted wives in this younger civilization. This was the ability to make a man supremely comfortable. It was not only shrewdness in yielding to a man's whims but anticipating them as well. Nor was it entirely the wisdom of cooking favorite foods, wearing the clothes he preferred, joining in his laughter or frowning with his displeasure. All this, plus the skill of a nurse, the efficiency of a perfect servant, the vigilance of a mother, the audacity of a mistress, the discretion of a wife, topped by a certain gusto in the performance — all these combined to make Julia's talent.

She could keep a whole meal warm for hours without destroying the flavor of the food. She knew how a man liked his bath, and where to hang the towels so he could reach out and find them without interrupting the reverie

induced by the warmth. When in other days Julia had laid out his clothes, Mark had got into them without an unnecessary movement. A pillow she had placed needed no readjustment. At the end of a hard day's work, when first they were married, there had been powder between the sheets to soothe Mark's exhausted limbs, and hot milk kept at the proper temperature on an alcohol lamp beside the bed. Attentions he had never heard of, never dreamed of.

That was Julia's power. By fulfilling unknown desires, she created an appetite for them. In the beginning she brought great happiness to Mark. Later, when she turned the household over to Mary, he felt the loss, not so much of the actual attentions as of the spirit they had fostered. During her only pregnancy Julia was very ill, and forced into an invalid's existence. Nina's birth wrought a not uncommon change. Though restored to health, Julia demanded the perennial tribute of luxury for the physical inconvenience of motherhood.

But now Mark needed care, and the old power, exercised occasionally through the years, tingled at her finger tips. Miss Baum, the day nurse, a solid rock of a woman, resented what she called Mrs. Wyndram's interference. Miss Baum had had wide experience in private sanitariums for nervous disorders, and she interpreted the comparative inactivity as a slight upon her professional reputation.

"After all, anybody can be taught to take pulse and temperature and respiration," she complained to Doctor Holzmann. She did not want to be discharged from the case, not exactly that, but she did think that she ought to have the sole care of the patient, since she was responsible.

"It'll be action here soon enough," Holzmann assured

her bluntly. "Or else maybe I don't know vot a good — " he lowered his voice, glancing at the emaciated man on the bed, "a good C-A looks like."

"Oh!" whispered Miss Baum, in altered manner, as if the two letters he mentioned were a cabalistic formula for rearranging even the stony atoms of her nature. "You think so?"

"Soon we'll know."

And yet it was Julia who first noticed that Mark's fingers were puffed; Julia who called Miss Baum's attention to his dry lips for which something must be done, even though he knew no conscious suffering.

The night nurse, however, little Miss Philips, a frail creature, who seemed to be on the down side of the see-saw, welcomed Julia's assistance. She was not half so tired on going off duty if Julia helped her sponge the patient. When two teaspoonfuls of calf's-foot jelly was the order for nine o'clock, she liked to know that Nina or Mary would come up on the dot with the heated liquid all prepared. That saved her the effort of walking over stairs.

On the Monday after this first hemorrhage, Nina announced her intention of staying at home.

"Better not," said her mother. "With your examinations coming soon — and graduation."

"I want to know the minute there's a change."

"Call up at noon."

"Please, Mother! Let me stay. Just until he recognizes one of us."

"Your father wouldn't like you to miss your school work."

The argument ceased. The mere mention of Mark's name, the unspoken thought of him, a gesture towards his

room, even a fancied wish, carried the weight of an authority he himself never saw fit to wield. For a week, he ruled the household by his curious silence, broken on a few occasions by a disjointed phrase, an irrelevant word, or a low moan. Highly concentrated liquid food was poured between his unresisting lips, beef extracts, fruit juices, synthetic nutrients. From time to time he opened his eyes but just at the moment when the film seemed about to be dissolved by consciousness, his lids drooped and again he was beyond reach. Though not complete oblivion, yet his condition was something more than the apathy of weakness, a sort of suspended animation punctuated by these fleeting returns to the brink of cognizance.

The three women of the house, and the three men who came in daily, radiated cheer, but they fooled neither each other nor themselves. Their buoyancy was just so much shouting in the woods, not for help, but to fight fear. The three physicians spent all their spare time at the old brownstone house, for which consideration Julia was grateful.

"Just in case anything should happen. Not that it will," she assured Nina hastily. "Holzmann says as long as he doesn't have another attack — oh, Dad's going to be about soon."

When Calucci and Otto were in, they sat upstairs in the front bedroom, watching the patient as if they had been hired for regular duty. This was no social matter to them. When Bingle served his turn, however, he preferred Julia's company, distracting her fears with his smooth bedside sales talk, while he followed her firm, swift movements with furtive eyes. If she could not have him about, he passed the time in the doctor's office, where Nina sat at her father's desk, answering personal inquiries with sweet

gravity, and professional calls with sweeter dignity. Bingle's very presence annoyed Nina, and as often as possible she contrived to be studying to avoid conversation. She felt self-conscious before that furtive look which Julia seemed scarcely to notice.

"We'll pull him out," Bingle told them one day, piping the same tune again. "You have no idea how much he's improved. You couldn't have, unless you understood all the fine points of the case. Peculiar case. Very peculiar. But everything is going to be fine. Now when he begins to get around, you bring him down to my place. I've got a fine roof there, you know, sunlight — cost me fifteen thousand to fix up. That'll be the place for him."

"Mark's funny about that," said Julia. "He likes his own home."

"Mother, we'll take care of Dad here, won't we?" put in Nina. "I don't want him to go to Doctor Bingle's."

The man chuckled. He knew she was only joking. Yes, sir, just a child joking. "And wouldn't you like to come down to see him every day, eh, Puss? And see me?"

"No, I wouldn't," insisted the girl.

"Nina!" said her mother sharply.

Privately Holzmann called Bingle to task. "What for you go telling them he's better? Better — what, how, when? If *you* see improvement, you got good eyes."

"His heart's better than it's been for a long time."

"Sure — because he lays like a corpse and don't move. What do you think happens when he walks around? The same like before. Or when you try to feed him up? Huh? Better! You know so much as I know, und none of us know what will be. If he comes out of coma, und we get stomach contents — "

Julia, herself suspicious by the end of the week, approached Calucci, who had just arrived, bearing a huge goats'-milk cheese shaped like a melon, and a box of dainties baked by his sister for Nina.

"Calucci," Julia bluntly opened the subject, "I think you're fooling me. What's the matter with Mark?"

"Me, Signora? Me fool you? Oh, no — no. Signor Doctore have bad heart. Very bad. Too much climb stairs. Too much rush around. Soon he gets better, he be high-tone. Sit in his office and patient come to him. Mustn't go out. Me fool you? No — no!"

"If his heart's bad, Calucci, what made the hemorrhage come through his stomach?"

"Like this, Signora. Blood pressure high, very high. Blood push, push, push, and look for place to come out. Find a weak spot in stomach, so blood comes out. Signor Doctore very lucky. If weak spot in brain, he be dead."

"No, there never was a weak spot in his brain," Julia laughed, breaking the tension and at the same time conveying to the other secret pride in Mark's superiority.

"You bet not," he agreed colloquially. "I tell you, Signora, he has brain and will like iron. His brain make him wake up. You see soon. He *make* himself come out."

And Calucci's prediction came true. He, more than Otto, and certainly more than the inflated Bingle, loved Mark Wyndram, and understood just how far the latter's mind could triumph over the flesh. The next morning, which was Sunday, the patient opened his eyes to a static world, wherein Julia and a strange woman in white, both figures sharp and clear in his vision, stood whispering to each other.

"Somebody — give me a lift here," he managed, faintly but coherently, "Got a cramp in my spine."

"God in heaven, it's Mark!" breathed Julia, as if the man they had nursed all this time had been a pretender, ousted at last by the rightful heir.

She reached him first, and gently turned him on his right side, as she knew he liked to lie, right hand behind his head. Miss Baum, with lips pressed tightly, made a crisp, scratchy entry on the chart: "Patient conscious, 10:12 A. M." Mark was too tired to talk, but by a deep sigh of relief he gave thanks to Julia. In this scant moment of perception his eyes had grown brighter. Obviously he was struggling to remember. Color tinged his lips. Before their eyes, his skin seemed to take on a different hue, the living hue.

"Julia — "

"Right," she laughed huskily. "That's me. And don't you go forgetting it. I'm Julia."

"Julia — "

"I wouldn't let him talk," put in Miss Baum.

"Oh, he's not going to. I know what's bothering him. You're right here in your own room, Mark. Only the cushions and lamps are out. And all the extra furniture and gewgaws. I put 'em all in the next room, in the living room. And I'm there any time you want me. This is Miss Baum, your nurse."

"Nurse — I see."

Julia went to the head of the stairs. "Nina!" she called. "Nina!" and her voice rang out in a fierce, nervous joy.

"Dad must be better!" Nina shouted hysterically to Mary.

The girl stumbled upstairs, crying and laughing as she

went, and brewing muddled plans for the celebration of his recovery. She dashed by her mother; in a burst of passionate thanksgiving, she flung herself to her knees at his bedside. Sobbing into her hands, like a child at prayer, she said:

"Dad — Dad — tell me if I could have helped you if I'd stayed. If I didn't go upstairs. I didn't want to leave you, Dad."

Miss Baum came forward, flourishing an imaginary club. With difficulty Wyndram raised his hand to warn her away. Nina's broken plea was the missing piece to a puzzle, if only he knew where that piece belonged or what the puzzle was. He frowned. Nina, looking up, realized instantly that such effort was bad for him. She sprang to her feet, and in shining enthusiasm faced the others. All that had been taut within her, all that had been winter-bound suddenly relaxed, suddenly melted, throbbing through her whole body with the pulse of a new seasonal cycle.

"Mother, can't we do something? Hang out the flag — or something?"

A smile wedged itself between the nurse's lips. Julia threw her head back and laughed to the very depths of her heart. At this point, Mary, who had followed Nina upstairs and stood flattened against the wall outside, betrayed herself by stepping closer to listen. Even Wyndram smiled from the obscurity of a week's beard.

"All right, Mary," said Julia. "Come on in. You can look at the doctor for a minute if you want to."

But Mary had a sense of delicacy. She would not interrupt the family reunion. "Oh, Mis' Wyndram, that's all right. Just so I know the doctor's better. That's all right."

"When Dad's well, we'll have a big dinner, here at home, for everybody who was good to us," suggested Julia.

"But couldn't I do something now? Go to church, maybe?"

"If you like," her mother granted.

"Only — Mother," protested the girl, when they started downstairs, "I don't know what church exactly. There are two up near school that I like. And then there's St. Anne's — "

The process of feeding Wyndram began. Not too much nor yet too little. No solid food, but not all liquid. No sugar, because he had developed a diabetes which might be temporary but might not. Milk, eggs, custards, all the semi-fluid messes and mushes he had prescribed often enough for others, but avoided himself.

"The patient's revenge, or a doctor killed by his own medicine," he remarked about a trayful Julia brought up.

Miracles unfolded before her eyes. Each day, almost each hour, she declared, he showed improvement. Soon he could sit up. Then he sat in a chair beside the bed. On the day he walked to the window, he demanded that the nurses be discharged.

"Not so fast, Doctore, not so fast," warned Calucci, watching the first steps. "This is no race. Run, run, run. What's your hurry?"

The nurses went, however, and Julia, in the next room, found little need to interrupt her sleep. Wyndram declared his vision improved by the rest. His brain was sharper too, he asserted. He had recalled all the events immediately preceding the attack, and a great many which occurred when he was supposed to have been in a stupor.

"Who were those men who stood around and laughed, one night?" he asked. "You were here too then, Tonio, weren't you?"

"Men? What you lay here for and make head work? Give brain a rest too."

"It's a good mental exercise. Who were they?"

"Men?" repeated Calucci, looking around to be sure the oxygen tanks had been removed. "Two men? Move furniture out, I suppose."

Within a week, Wyndram wanted to read. By this time he could move about freely, so long as he confined the range of his activity to the one floor. Coming up one day, Julia found him in the bathroom fumbling with his razor. He laughed apologetically.

"Shave and haircut, Mark?"

They had a lot of fun over it. Nina was the barber's assistant. She dubbed her mother "The Barberess of Seville," and sang snatches of the opera as she handed her the necessary equipment. Hot towels, cold towels, lotions, creams, shouts of merriment, clowning; and woven through the scene a thread of emotional unity which transfigured the plebeian character of the task. Unlike Samson, after Mark was relieved of his hirsute burden, he declared himself fit enough to work. Julia took that as a hint, but was firm about permitting him to walk downstairs.

"What's the difference?" he asked.

"Mark! You've got to keep your heart in condition."

Thoughtfully he rubbed his left side, as if to soothe some irritation there.

"What's the matter, Mark? Is there a seam in your pajamas that bothers you?"

He stopped immediately. "No. What I meant was that

at my age, whatever I do doesn't matter much. Don't you follow Tonio's advice too closely. Or Otto's either. They're a couple of old women. Even if they hand you out a list of 'don't's,' let me use my own discretion, will you?"

"No, I won't. You don't want another siege, Mark, do you?"

He twined his fingers about hers. They sat silent, in a moment of awkward tenderness. "Must have been pretty hard on you, Julia."

Unnoticed, Nina tiptoed out.

"Not that, Mark. For your sake, I don't want a relapse."

"Some time soon," he said irrelevantly, "call up Larry and ask him to come over."

Larry was a cousin, a lawyer, and Wyndram's request was somehow a mockery of hope. Julia consulted the three men.

"Do you think he knows something — we don't know?" she ventured.

"Let me get a specialist," was Holzmann's answer.

Julia turned on him savagely, but he anticipated her accusation with a denial. "We'll wait until he gets a little strength before the specialist begins to poke and push and X-ray and take blood tests."

IV

Of course Mark was not to be told of the plan. In Julia's presence, Holzmann made arrangements with Doctor Jevons, a man whose name, when coupled with the illness or death of a prominent citizen, lent added dignity to that event. Indeed, no personage seemed empowered to yield his mortal remains, or at least to do so on the front page of a newspaper, without benefit of Jevons. To call David Jevons into consultation was like calling a certain notorious lawyer who defended only the guilty. As the governor's pardon is sought in a last-minute appeal for the life of a condemned prisoner, so was his wizardry evoked many times daily to dole out medical indulgence.

Unless the patient were in very desperate condition, Doctor Jevons had no free time for several days, his secretary told Holzmann. The latter, knowing that one day or ten mattered little, settled on a date in the early part of the following week. That interval of waiting meant a dozen different changes of heart for Julia. First, Mark seemed in such good health that she felt foolish about her own hysteria. Still, as Nina pointed out in her new rôle of companion and solace, there could be no harm, if only as a precaution, in having an authority give him a thorough examination. Then, Julia was afraid of frightening Mark, since he really might not suspect a serious complication. On the other hand, if he had any doubts himself about the

prognosis, he might be made happier at the dissipation of this uncertainty.

All avenues of logic led to the same conclusion. Jevons would — must — laugh the whole matter off. Perhaps Mark had wanted another opinion all along. Though, as a physician, he knew that the request for a specialist implies no lack of confidence in the individual general practitioner, yet because these men attending him were devoted friends, he may have preferred to sacrifice his desire rather than risk the least slight to their affection.

Often Julia thought, "After all, they know what's best. Mark always said that if Holzmann had the chance and his strength held out, he'd be one of the topnotchers."

The thought carried with it an inevitable but undeserved opposite. "He married a rich woman and went to Europe for six months on a honeymoon. Now he thinks he's a stomach specialist himself because he won't take any other kind of case. Nobody put him in charge here. I guess Calucci knows as much."

She said aloud to the German, "Maybe a diagnostician isn't what we want. Perhaps a stomach man — "

They happened to be in the dining room, and instantly the man reached for the telephone extension on the black marble mantel. "Whatever you say, Mrs. Wyndram. Is there somebody special?" he asked, suspecting Bingle of a little underground propaganda.

His alacrity disarmed her, cheapened her ambiguous behavior. "No, no," she assured him. "Let things be. We'll wait for this man Jevons."

By the appointed day, Wyndram had begun to lose some of his recently gained weight, and Julia watched for the hour of Jevon's arrival as a true believer awaits the com-

ing of the Messiah. But no blare of trumpets, no flood of dazzling light, not even the turning of automobile wheels announced his approach. Just a ring of the doorbell.

David Jevons had the physique of Abraham Lincoln, tall, bony, with loose-knit frame; only his face was fuller, and he boasted less hair on his head than is displayed in current pictures of the Emancipator. He wore an overcoat that a lesser man in any walk of life would have scorned, and he slung it casually over the banister, much to the mortification of Mary, who, in lace cap and apron donned for the occasion, stood ready to relieve him of the burden. Though not beguiled by the flimsy excuse that Otto had met Jevons at a clinic and thereupon conceived the idea of inviting him along for an unofficial visit, nevertheless Mark made no effort to conceal his interest at meeting the great man, even under such circumstances. He was sitting in a beach chair beside the bed, and would have risen except that Jevons forbade it.

"Keep your seat, Doctor. No formality. With your particular heart, every movement counts."

"I could have spared you this trouble, Doctor Jevons," returned Mark. "Want a diagnosis?"

"That's not according to Osler," laughed the other. "The patient is never taken into consultation."

After that the sick man made no comment. "Let these men have the satisfaction, if they want it," was his attitude.

The examination, which Jevons conducted in shirt sleeves, consumed only a few minutes. His knotty but delicate hands passed back and forth swiftly like mechanical sounding-instruments, mechanical yet somehow sentient. Wyndram's silence was pointed. Jevons shook hands with

him and then motioned the others to follow. They led him down into the office, away from the patient, whose hearing had lately become remarkably acute. Julia, excluded from the sick room, now hovered outside, hoping to catch a word. The first portion of the conversation was inaudible to her.

"We don't want him to know," said Holzmann, careful of his pronunciation.

"Naturally. Especially in this case. What did you say your diagnosis was, Doctor?"

"Carcinoma of the stomach."

"Yes — yes — " echoed Calucci.

"Don't agree with you," said Jevons. "I think it's the pancreas. That would account for the sudden diabetes."

"What's the difference?" challenged Holzmann.

"Scientific exactitude, that's all. I give him six weeks, eight at most. When pain begins, prescribe morphine. A mild diuretic might prolong comfort. And digitalis to keep the heart down." He was at the door now, and stood with his hand on the knob. This was the point at which Julia reaped the first harvest of her patience, the first and the last. "As for food," Jevons continued, "let's not be hard on him. The thing that's caught him is vile enough *per se* without burden of further prohibition. Give him anything to eat that he wants, or can hold. He's damned if he does — and damned if he doesn't."

Then he waved away all hint of a fee, took his leave of Julia, without granting her a word on her husband's condition, and hurried down, Calucci after him to bow him out. The Latin moved to help the great man with his coat.

"No, no, Doctor, not that," protested Jevons. "I'm spry enough, yet."

Julia turned slowly to Holzmann. "What does he mean, 'he's damned if he does, and damned if he doesn't'?"

"If you heard so much, then you must know yourself," he evaded, to test the extent of her eavesdropping.

"That's all I got. He stood right at the door here."

"He means — give your husband whatever he wants to eat. If it's hard to digest or easy to digest, it don't matter."

"Will that do him any good?"

"Well — "

"And why didn't he want me in there? Why didn't he tell me something?"

"A busy man like him can't talk too long. He thought we were doctors, and your friends; we'll tell you everything."

"Then go ahead with everything. I asked you — Why did he say 'damned'?"

"Don't you know what it is — 'damned'?"

"Oh!" she breathed incredulously, drawing herself up as if to command the truth from him.

Calucci walked upstairs slowly, his head bent but eyes strained upward on the two talking in the hall. "Otto," he said, "I think we must tell Mis' Wyndram."

"Yes, tell me," she cried. "I'm his wife. I've got to know. If anything happens to him — I'll be left behind. And there's Nina. I want to know."

"Sh!" cautioned Holzmann. Then brutally, "Carcinoma."

"What's that!" she snapped.

"Cancer."

Julia actually sighed with relief. She mused, "Nonsense! Mark's a doctor himself. He'd feel it coming. Wouldn't he?"

"And doctors can't get sick? Let me tell you, he couldn't feel it coming, and you couldn't, and Jevons couldn't himself. Nobody knows when it begins, or how. And that's why Jevons didn't talk to you or to Mark. You think a man like him beats around the bushes? He talks honest, with himself and with you, — only not when it's cancer. That's bad. Like the electric chair. When a man sits in it and the current is turned on, nobody can help him. Before he sits down he gets the best food, and cigars, and candy. It don't make any difference any more."

"Then if it is — that," argued Julia, hesitating over the use of the proper name, "wouldn't a great man like Doctor Jevons be very much put out over it? And talk to me seriously, instead of acting as if it meant nothing?"

Calucci nudged Holzmann for the express purpose of taking the matter out of his hands. The Italian was shrewder and understood what bothered Julia in the diagnostician's attitude. Her notion was that Jevons should have sounded an alarm in proportion to the gravity of the situation. A man like Bingle, who endowed the simplest ailment with possible fatality, would have acted thus. To men of Jevons' standing, aside from their habitual ruthlessness, nothing is of so little relative importance as the hopeless case. Calucci was clever enough to attempt no argument on these grounds. He proceeded with additional proof that was not without its grim truth.

"See, Signora. If it is something else, not cancer, the famous doctore tell you very short and sharp and quick. This sickness frighten everybody. To-day next fellow have it. To-morrow maybe I have it, maybe Otto. In hospital, everybody treat such patient like child. Give him what he wants, let him talk, let him walk, tell him joke, bring him

presents. Soon all over. What's the matter, you think we fool you? If we do, we pick out some nicer sickness, eh?"

Julia listened to each word and believed not a single one. "Why do you say 'soon all over'?" she countered resentfully. "People don't die, just like that. Not if they get care — "

"Six or eight weeks is pretty soon," mumbled Holzmann.

"Weeks? Weeks?" she echoed harshly. "You're crazy. I don't believe you. He hasn't got cancer. Nonsense. Six or eight weeks! He looks fine now and eats with a healthy appetite. You're all a bunch of old women. Mark said so himself," and she brushed by them on her way up to see Wyndram.

"Always same trouble," remarked Calucci softly. "Everybody think next fella get sick but not me, not my family. One fella go to hospital, have operation, but never me. Oh, no! Otto — I guess you and me think so too, only we too smart to say it."

Nevertheless, Julia tried to reach Thomas Wyndram that very day. He was always secretive about his lodgings but she knew of several clubs where she could leave messages for him, with reasonable assurance that he would receive them in the course of the week. She called the college first. Then the National Arts Club, the Newspapermen's, the Princeton Club, and before she exhausted the list, he had happened in at one of these stations.

"Say, Thomas, what do you know about cancer?" she thrust at him when she heard his voice.

Before that arch listener, the telephone, Thomas Wyndram invariably stood mute. He hated the contrivance for its lack of discrimination, and much as he loved to talk, he

found the rubberoid ear of the instrument an unresponsive audience.

"My dear Julia! How's Mark?"

"You'd better come to see him yourself. There's something you ought to know, anyway."

Her imperative tone must have carried weight, for the professor appeared a short time after this conversation.

"That's all very well, all very well," was his comment on her story. "But even great men may draw erroneous conclusions. Take for instance, the case of my friend Potter, George G. Potter. No doubt you have heard of him. I refer to the man who went into Tibet — "

Never greatly impressed by her brother-in-law's erudition, Julia grew impatient about "for instance, the case of my friend Potter." Her interest lay in the case of her husband, Mark. Perhaps in an hour Thomas might reach that point. And he was no physician, with all his many degrees. What she had wanted was a confirmation of her own stand, not a general survey of the advancement of cancer research. She interrupted him, rudely in his opinion, but justifiably in hers.

"Why don't you go up and see what he looks like for yourself?"

Thomas greeted his brother genially, quite as if this were his fiftieth instead of his first visit since the other fell ill. "Ah, good evening, Mark. How splendid you look." And turning to Julia, "Splendid! I have not seen him look so well in years. Another pound gained, a slight intensification of color in his cheeks, and he will be a positive affront to *us* weaklings."

"Oh, there's nothing wrong with my health," Julia assured him. Now that he corroborated her feeling toward

Mark she was secretly indignant at the implication in Thomas' voice that his brother might not have been in the saddened plight she described. She thought, "If he went through what Mark did, he'd be groaning all over ten hospitals."

Mark closed the book he was reading. The years of his association with Calucci had regenerated a boyhood desire to read "The Inferno" in the original. Time, and the energy to struggle with it had been lacking. Now, the pressure of daily routine lifted, he had taken to the work avidly, and with his fair knowledge of conversational Italian, a foundation of Latin, and a good language sense, he was making headway. The copy he held was a gift from Calucci, with those passages marked which he thought Wyndram would understand more readily. From the pocket of the sick man's bathrobe protruded a small Italian-English dictionary. He regarded his brother with the impatient look of a man interrupted in a labor of love.

"Sit down, Thomas," he said, indicating the chair beside his own, on which several books were piled. Julia swept them into her arms, set them in orderly array on a table between the windows, and then turned to putting the bedclothes in order.

"You astonish me, Mark," Thomas proceeded, "by seeking advice of a diagnostician instead of a — "

Julia hissed angrily, swishing the sheets over the bed. "I told you he didn't send for Jevons. Holzmann met him in a clinic."

" — Instead of an authority on the diseases of the heart." Thomas had meant to say "stomach" but thought better of it after Julia's correction.

Sardonic amusement glistened in Wyndram's eyes.

"You know a lot about it, don't you, Thomas? I don't need a specialist in anything. Your advice has one fault. It's always late. Why didn't you come here and tell that to Julia before?"

"You do not understand, Mark."

"Shut up," said the older brother. "It makes no difference to me. For my part, you don't have to come to my funeral. But you know Julia has no family. She's been going through this alone, with a couple of strange men who were to her what you ought to be. I didn't know the difference. You never even called up to make her feel good."

"I despise the telephone, Mark."

"Mark did a lot of things he hated in his life," Julia reminded him. She glided closer, then coiled back on herself, lurking, hoping that her husband would at last, after twenty years, come to a reckoning with his brother. She wanted the satisfaction of it, the definiteness, the finality.

Thomas had grown very pale, and he shifted uneasily. "You do me an injustice, Mark."

"Does anybody ever do you anything else?" countered the other, reddening.

"I have been ill myself. But be calm, my dear Mark. I have no desire to retard your convalescence by impressing upon you the inconsiderate character of your accusation."

Julia was disappointed at Mark's sudden reversal. "Of course you're sick! You'd go to the hospital for dandruff. Always examining yourself with the suspicious eye of a coroner. I suppose I'm to thank you for this visit. Stay for dinner if you want to, but just now leave me alone, with my — inferno."

"As always, he is unreasonable and excitable," said Thomas to Julia later.

Julia did not care for his opinion. She was not going to believe that Mark's death was imminent, for the simple reason that she did not want to. With the facts confronting her, she preferred delusion, and to explain his rapid decline she sought irrelevant causes. Her favorite one was that Jevons had worked some harm, for Mark had been improving until arrangements were made with the diagnostician. What, then, had happened to start this relapse immediately after?

Despite her mother's elaborate justification, Nina believed that her father's days were numbered. The girl went about like one bearing secret shame, heavy with it, guilty. Her eyes were dulled with it; her lips parched. Her heart pounded with quickened strokes, beating once for herself and once for this terrible secret. She was afraid to meet her father's direct gaze and afraid not to. She shrank from replying to inquiry that he seemed a little better, yet she considered it disloyal to say he was not. Dad was dying. She carried the secret burden in her, yet grew with it and for it, developing in body and limb and breast as if to meet the new responsibility soon to be imposed upon her. She asked herself fiercely why relatives who had not seen her in years treated her like a child. They said such stupid things about how she had grown, and did she get high marks in school, and when was she going to graduate. Like the seven dwarfs with Snow White, she concluded, only the little men had never seen a mortal before, and accordingly were to be excused. Could they not see that childhood was behind her? Because Dad was dying.

Even the words echoed strangely. He who had saved many was beyond his own ministrations. He went downhill so rapidly, it seemed hardly possible to those about

him that he did not recognize the symptoms in his mirrored reflection. He lost weight with alarming speed. He could neither eat nor sleep nor rest. He spent many more hours in bed than he had during that period of false recovery. And when he did get up for a few hours, he insisted upon being fully dressed, and he walked about with a victorious air, like one proving to himself that he could still fulfill some function of normal life.

Ordinary drugs brought him no relief, and certainly no sleep. Besides, he resented taking them. Once having accepted a dose, he fought its consequences with the desperation of a patient fighting ether. He clung to consciousness, however painful it might be. By night, the front bedroom became a torture chamber. From bed to chair, from chair to bed. From bed to window, then back to the bed went Wyndram. An invisible leech sucked at his vitals. An invisible octopus sent out slender tentacles, twisting, turning, embracing, throttling that with which they came in contact. A single cell, gone astray, feasted in the darkness on others of its kind, until by absorbing those other millions it had become lord of them all.

But about his brain he had built a fortress against the inroad of cannibal cells, and through his eyes, those loopholes in the parapet of his will, he defied the outlaws with cerebral artillery. He read the newspapers greedily. He evinced the greatest interest in the least of household occurrences, questioning Mary about an altercation with the iceman, discussing the advisability of setting the plants out in the back yard, as was done every year in May, suggesting that Julia have a window cleaner come instead of letting Mary sit out of third-story windows.

Nina came home every day prepared to recount the de-

tails of her school life. Her father seemed never to weary of the recital, as if each repetition were a block of stone added to the fortress, as if block upon block must eventually repulse the cannibal hordes. What had Miss So-and-So said about the algebra problem he helped her solve? What was the review about to-day? Had the Regents' Examinations been growing more difficult of late? What date had been set for the commencement exercises? What must she wear? Were there other festivities for the occasion?

Gradually word of Mark's illness spread to the family, his family. Toward all who visited him he adopted the same attitude. They arrived to pay their last respects but left to marvel at his mental vigor, assuring Julia that he could have no premonition of death. Dying people were self-centered, and no word of complaint passed his lips. They came to comfort. They left, having been comforted, with new views of their own problems which unintentionally they had bared to him.

All this filled Wyndram's days, but the nights —

And the cold —

The eternal chill was creeping in on him. He could not be warmed. Neither by robe nor blanket, by furnace heat nor sun heat. He could not be warmed. He was cold, eternally cold. The thing that fed on him warmed its own hands at his body fires but added no fuel to keep the flame alive for him. Out of his gray skull of a face, his eyes still glowed, but the steady light had power only to penetrate; none to warm.

The new Mrs. Holzmann walked down one afternoon. She had sent a basket of fruit along in advance, and brought a few books with her, because Otto had told her that Doctor Wyndram could not enjoy the food but would

welcome reading matter. She was tiny, and young, scarcely older than Nina, and she worshiped her husband with a romantic enthusiasm so genuine as almost to flout the belief that the bond between them was entirely gilt-edged. Thankfully, Julia left Nina to entertain her. She had more in common with daughter than with mother, anyway.

Shortly after, Mrs. Bingle drove over in the doctor's expensive car, with a bronze caduceus surmounting the hood, an enameled red cross over the radiator, and a paper cross glued to one window. Yes, sir — I belong to a physician, rumbled the motor. Wyndram had, in fact, once suggested to Bingle that he attach to the door a placard announcing his name, address and fees. Then the rolling advertisement would be complete. Within this ornamented structure, Mrs. Bingle looked grotesquely out of place. She was all telescoped inside herself, like a Japanese lantern, showing a glint of folded color now and then, but lacking depth and roundness except in the possibility. And constantly she watched her husband with a curious sidewise glance, a curious, watchful flatness, as if waiting for him to draw her out of herself, to hang her up on display, to put a candle inside which would illuminate all the pretty colors she knew she possessed.

The whole world came to wish Wyndram Godspeed. Old and young and middle-aged. Friends, relatives, mere acquaintances. Rich and poor. Patients.

Calucci spent several nights a week with the sick man, sitting at his side until dawn. On these occasions, the long years of Wyndram's reading, of which Julia was jealous, bore fruit in the real triumph of mind over disease. The two men talked all night, argued, discussed, re-discussed, tore each other's politics to ribbons, split hairs over meta-

physics. Each lectured to the other on the particular literature with which he was familiar. Words, like incantations, kept the fiend at bay, in Wyndram's consciousness at least. Nothing could retard the advance upon the flesh.

But chiefly they spoke of religion. Calucci declared himself too much the scientist to deny a divine Power. That, to Wyndram was a paradox.

"No, Doctore, see. I mean science discovers everything. Lots of belief what people have a hundred year ago science show is wrong, and sometime right. And science find out a million things nobody ever dream of before. Maybe some day science find out if God is, or is not. I keep my mind free. Only science must tell me, not priest."

Mark accused his friend of harboring a few tenets of his early training. For his part he denied that the existence of a deity could be proved by any means.

"You can't prove to me that the moon is made of green cheese. Nobody can. It's too old. If it were, the stink would have reached us long ago. Why bother to keep an open mind about a thing that can't be?"

On Memorial Day, which was a holiday in New York, Wyndram held his last court. He was very ill that day. He kept up, but with visible effort in his eyes, the last watch fires kindled on the mountain top to frighten off the blood-hungry.

His sister Martha and her husband came from Boston with their two sons, and a young married daughter, Eleanor. The two sons of a dead sister came down from Harvard. Thomas was there, and endless numbers of cousins, and an old, old man, a friend of Mark's father, and older than the latter would have been had he lived.

"The Angel of Death has passed me by," he said to

Julia. "All of my generation are gone. Now he is after the next generation. But he passed me by. Why doesn't he call me?"

Mark's nephews stood around, stalwart boys all, alert and confident, one a lawyer, one a chemist, the third a medical student, the tallest a football hero. Death would have been courageous indeed to have attacked him now, surrounded as he was by this cordon of youth and brawn and muscle and energy. When Mark saw how their eyes followed Nina, he dismissed them with a joke, bade them go outside for a smoke, and to get acquainted all over again with their cousin.

But Eleanor, his only niece, was having a hard time of it. Married a year, she was six months pregnant, and the trip, the accompanying shock of seeing her uncle in such a deplorable state, and the attempt at control in order not to frighten him, had unnerved her. On the whole, her first experience with fruition was thus far attended by months of discomfort, and the present situation was not one to contribute to her happiness. She sat at the window, her pale face averted, her features strained, her throat tense. Thomas, unaware of her condition, had undertaken to distract her attention by intimate questions concerning her health, of which she had faintly complained.

"You must be very careful, my dear child, very careful indeed."

"I have the best doctor in Boston," answered Eleanor rather stiffly. She had married well.

"That may be, but perhaps he is not sufficiently impressed with the importance of this ailment you so oddly call 'morning sickness.' He should have prescribed some remedial measures many weeks ago."

The young woman, only nineteen, fumbled with the ultra-smart maternity wrap she had not removed. "I suppose — there isn't any remedy," she hesitated, flushing slightly in embarrassment.

"Such attitude is the result of ignorance," persisted the professor. "I myself have experienced this very agony. Ah, yes, my dear, I appreciate your suffering — that morning vertigo, the nausea, the resultant weakness — "

"But, Uncle Thomas, how could you?" gasped the girl.

"Yes, yes," he mused. "As you described the symptoms, I lived through them again. They are the semaphores of approaching illness, my dear, and while you are in New York you must permit me to take you to my good friend Allen Downer, an authority on diseases of the stomach. It was he, and no other, who cured me of the very thing."

"I wouldn't dream of letting a strange doctor examine me. Besides, I know what's wrong, Uncle Thomas."

"You force me to impatience, Eleanor. You are falsely modest and stubborn. Then you must stop in at my rooms and permit me to give you some of the medicine wherewith I was cured. I keep a bottle of it about for emergency. And eat eggs, my dear, plenty of eggs."

In desperation, Eleanor glanced about the room. "Good heavens! I couldn't eat eggs," she protested.

Mark must have noticed her uneasiness. "Thomas!" he called. "Better take Eleanor out. This is no place for her."

"If she but listened to me, she would be fit in a short time," he complained to Mark. "That is the trouble with you people. You do not cherish this divine gift of health. I should like to persuade her to visit my friend Doctor Downer, who cured me of the same manifestations."

"You damn fool," said the sick man. "Let her alone."

The young medical student, reëntering in time to hear Thomas' last appeal, burst into hearty laughter. What a monstrous joke to recount at a smoker!

After that day, resignation settled over the house. Wyndram was starving to death. In a world of food, and money to buy food, the sick man starved to death.

"I say sometimes Tantalus must be man with cancer," said Calucci.

"Wot in hell is Tantalus?" returned Holzmann. "This way or that way, it's a bad business."

For the whole month of June, Julia did not stir from the house. A seamstress came in to make Nina's graduation dress, but the girl had the feeling she would never wear it. During Regents' week Wyndram was very low. Daily he asked Julia, "Have you got the 'phone number of Nina's school?" And he waited for the girl's return with the impatience of a man to whom time is of the utmost value. He forced himself to live beyond that week, that he might not interfere with the girl's examinations. On Thursday, when she had taken the last of them, he called wife and daughter to him. For a moment of quivering silence he stroked their hands with his waxy fingers. Then he spoke.

"Julia — Nina. I'm dying. No — don't deny it. It's been my experience that a man's family — that those left behind always ask whether the patient knew he was — dying. I'd rather tell you myself — than have you speculate. I'm dying, but it's not as terrible as you think it is — to know."

It was he who comforted Nina. Later he sent for Mary, to say good-by. Julia sent for Miss Baum. Friday morning Wyndram asked Nina again about the last question

of the fourth-year English paper. And what had she written? Saturday morning he asked the nurse to raise the shades. They had not been drawn at all. His breath bore the miasma of decay. At twilight, he called Julia. When she reached him from the next room, his jaw was slack.

"Run for Nina!" she cried, covering his eyes. Nina was too late.

"Conscious to the last," said Julia.

"At least, he didn't know it was cancer," sobbed the girl.

V

Still searching for an emotional peg on which to hang the physical phenomenon of death, and especially of her father's death, Nina stopped before the tiny church. She had never seen one in the city quite so small or so toylike, and its miniature size had not a little to do with her decision. A polychrome Madonna above the lancet entrance arch seemed freshly painted. The image was large in proportion to the rest of the stone structure, and just because Nina expected to find some charming little figure, the contrast between anticipation and reality captivated her imagination. Out of the Madonna's face, deep blue eyes set in gilded eyeballs stared fixedly down the parched street, at the same time, with that dual power invested in sacred statues, calling attention to a memorial candle in a red glass balanced on one outstretched palm. Nina wondered who climbed up there to set the candle.

The city was becalmed in the late August heat. Even that flame overhead, exposed to the air, showed no signs of flickering. Half-naked children thronged gutter and sidewalks; some gathered about an ice wagon, others about an ice-cream vender who sold his tinted wares under a great parasol marked with the name of a department store. Another group tampered with the street hydrant. For that day at least, New Yorkers were united by a single purpose — to find relief. If horseshoes are indeed magnets of good luck, then was some glory about to de-

scend upon the metropolis, for many horses' hoofs had left patterns of their impressions on the soft asphalt. Out of windows in every tenement protruded round, drooping heads like drops of perspiration suspended on a dirty, hard face.

All this, which Nina glimpsed rather than observed, served to shed radiance on the queer little temple in a district beyond First Avenue to which she had never before penetrated. With this unusual exterior what exotic satisfaction might not the interior afford? The church stood flush with the dwellings on either side of it, and neither steps nor gate complicated the approach. Heavy wooden doors with ornate wrought-iron hinges yielded to Nina's effort. There was a ponderous knob which required the force of both hands to turn, and beneath this a huge keyhole.

"Big enough for an elephant to go through," thought the girl. Or was it a camel? And then perhaps it was not a keyhole but a needle's eye, after all.

"There ain't nothin' in there now, sissy," offered a little boy, with the body of eight but the face of twenty-eight.

The girl required no formal services to induce the desired exaltation. She entered with that poise and self-assurance which another of her age, status, and generation might exhibit upon entering a new motion-picture theater. Nina was experienced in visiting churches, and as familiar with all the larger places of worship in her native city as are most tourists with the cathedrals of Europe. Having been given perfect freedom in the matter by permission of her father and the indifference of her mother, she had developed a decided fondness for churches. To her a

church appeared as does a book to the ignorant, — something generic to be distinguished from its fellows by cover and size, rather than contents.

Since her father's death, however, she had been partial to the Roman Catholic style of architecture. In the dim vestibule, a small red electric light guided the worshiper to a simple glass bowl in a niche. Nina had seen others perform the rite, and now, craving the full experience, she decided to put her observations to use. Her finger tips skimmed the surface of the hallowed water, and thus fortified, they traced the outline of the cross. Her performance fell short of the intention, for she made the transverse movement before the perpendicular, and her fingers moved from right to left instead of in the opposite direction. Quite ignorant of her error, she opened the inner doors, fashioned like the others, thus stepping into the church itself. Here too Nina thought she knew just what to do. Facing the altar squarely, she crossed herself again, and bowed, but her obeisance resembled more the sweeping curtsy of the dancing school than the prescribed genuflexion.

At last satisfied with her offices, Nina slipped into a seat on the aisle. She could distinguish nothing except a few memorial candles up in front where the altar rail must be. Here, in this cool, damp grotto, she would surely find peace, and the answer to her riddle. She seemed to be alone. No sound of the swarming life outside penetrated these stone walls. Perhaps this was like death. Perhaps the grave was like this — just a cluster of lights burning in the quivering darkness, just rubies afire in a black secret mine, and a sense of elation filling one's lungs. She preferred to think of her father in some such sanctuary

rather than in that fissure of Long Island sand. The other way a cruel earthquake had devoured him. This way, death was respite from life. Not the lonely state of oblivion her father himself had declared it to be, but a retreat, where friends might come to pass an hour of contemplation with a loved one inside the gate.

Nina thought of it very concretely. By sitting here, or in any church, she could visit her father, or at least comprehend his presence. She was a sieve through which the jewel dust of exaltation sifted noiselessly, and particles of its glitter clung to her, tightened about her throat, liquefied into soft, quiet tears. Objects began to take shape, the fretted rail, arabesques, paintings on the wall, images. And finally a figure kneeling before the altar. It was a priest. Fascinated, Nina watched his silent devotions. Presently he rose, glided up the aisle and passed so close that she could have touched him. Incense clung to the fold of his skirts. He did not notice the girl.

As if his passing had pressed a hidden button, the instant he closed the door two chandeliers overhead leaped into light. The vaulted compactness of the place filled Nina with new wonder. Immediately a big man lumbered in, a broom in hand, and before he set about his task, he too sought the Lord's blessing. Nina would have liked to kneel before the bleeding Christ, but she felt self-conscious. What could she say to Jesus? How did one address Him? Had she enough fine language at her command to engage His interest? Yet this simple man with the broom under his arm knew how. Ah — he had been reared in the faith, no doubt, and had learned the method. Eagerly she watched him at the business of removing the world's dust from the place of the spirit. His progress was slow, for he

grumbled a prayer before each image, and rendered homage to each station of the cross. Finally he came to rest before a painting which Nina had not seen in the first burst of light.

The panel contained but one figure, that of a nun in pale robes, tall enough to be real, real enough to awaken in Nina a sharp pain of sympathy. The suffering nun stood with head slightly tilted back, bloodless lids lowered over sunken eyes. The cause of that exquisite agony imprisoned in her thin features was apparent. A distorted crown had slipped from her hands, but had not yet fallen to the ground; and her whole body was braced backward to meet the final shock when the crown should strike the cold stone of her convent cell. The hands revealed a life story. They were stripped of the flesh by vigil and fast, yet retained in the spirit a haunting grace. In the very bones they retained a wordliness which no denial of this flesh had altered. The skeleton fingers were curved, as if they had not only held the crown but had lifted it from the brow it was never again to adorn.

The mystery of those hands made Nina pleasantly nervous. She drew deep draughts of excitement from the picture. What sin had this poor woman committed? Was the diadem a voluntary sacrifice, or one ordered by the Master? Nina moved along the row of seats toward the painting. The man with the broom produced a bandanna, and with infinite care wiped a morsel of dust from the nun's wimple.

"Who is that?" Nina whispered.

He stared at her vacantly, resuming his work.

"Am I in your way?" she asked, when the dust began to invade her nostrils.

Still she received no answer. Carrying with her the new mood, she went out. In the vestibule, the priest was arranging some printed pamphlets in a wire rack on the wall. Beneath the crust of his habitual composure, surprise stirred vaguely at sight of a girl in the somber dress of mourning which hardly concealed the joyousness of the body it was designed to cover.

"Father — " she began timidly. His attentive silence encouraged her. "Can you tell me what that picture is? I mean the nun with the falling crown. Is she a saint?"

Trace of a foreign language lingered in his accent. "Saint Salomea, a Polish saint. It is a picture by a famous Polish artist, Wyspianski. The man who is sweeping the church copied it from a little colored print of the original. He is only a house painter — "

" — And God inspired him to do this sacred work!" she interrupted in exaltation.

The priest was a youngish, ruddy-faced man, with sandy hair and round, unblinking blue eyes. He nodded almost proudly. "Yes, this talent was given him that he might beautify the church. All his spare time he spends here, decorating, refreshing, reproducing the masterpieces of sacred art for his humble parish."

"And I thought him just a common workman. Just a clod," murmured the girl in self-accusation. "Poor St. Salomea. She's magnificent, don't you think so? This must be a Polish church."

"A church for all who believe," amended the priest.

Nina was leaning against the door, the white hand pressed over her heart accentuating her breasts, and her eyes luminous, by their raptness giving the impression

that they were lifted to his. His round eyes seemed to bore down to her secret.

"But I'm not of your faith," she confessed, with a certain full passion in her voice. "I'm not of any faith. I don't belong anywhere. My mother — yes — I think my mother was brought up to be a Catholic, but my father didn't believe — in — in anything," she hesitated.

"Let no man tell you he does not believe. He who knows that death is imminent, and what man does not, has an inner yearning for faith, whatever blasphemy his lips may utter."

"That's what I have always felt. A desire for faith. And now my father has been dead two months. And I want to believe — something. Ever since he died — "

The priest lost a shade of his ecclesiastical formality. "The door is always open, my child. Come in any time you want to."

Before she left, Nina took a few of the English pamphlets. "Facts for Catholics", "Facts for Non-Catholics", "What Every Enlightened Person Should Know about Catholicism." The others were in Polish. Then she dropped fifty cents into the box for the parish poor. She hadn't the courage to cross herself in the presence of the priest. Stolidly he looked after her. He was no pagan, but in the secular recesses of his brain lurked childhood memories of a Polish village at the edge of a forest. He thought of how the trees looked after a summer rain, newly bathed, glistening, transformed in adoration of the force that had given them new hope.

Outside life pulsed on with the irregular, rapid beat of fever. This was Nina's first summer in New York. She had always gone to expensive private camps while

Julia "rested" in some more expensive summer resort, leaving Doctor Wyndram at home to provide the ways and means, and Mary to manage the household. Far from bemoaning her fate, the girl was enjoying a new experience. She thought she was too old for discipline, anyway, even if Dad had lived. True enough, her mother had tried to wring the money for another two months in camp from Uncle Thomas, but Nina really did not care, though Julia had been disgruntled over the failure. Nina derived more than a vicarious thrill from eavesdropping on the whole city. She liked to hear girls in stuffy subways talk of the equally stuffy beaches — Coney Island and Pelham, Rye and Rockaway and City Island and Palisades Park. She liked to see men sprinting through the streets for trains, and women in taxis with valises strapped outside, and trunks piled like camels' humps on express trucks, and families loaded with a week's provisions for a day's trip up the Hudson.

Of course she missed the swimming in heat like this. When she walked through the park, she watched the public tennis with momentary longing. The bridle path recalled happy hours. The lake at One Hundred and Tenth Street, dotted with rowboats propelled by ardent but perspiring swains at so much per hour, reminded her of a five-day canoe trip up a chain of small lakes. And yet because she was not essentially an athletic type, though proficient enough at sports, Nina did not even scheme for a share in these city pleasures, now that she was deprived of the others.

The girl took the Eighty-sixth Street cross-town car home. From one brownstone tomb, mother and daughter had merely descended to another, this one, however, hav-

ing already suffered the inevitable fate of its contemporaries. Indeed, their old home, sold immediately after Wyndram's death, was now "undergoing extensive alterations," so the placard said, to emerge as a honeycomb of "high-class one-room and kitchenette apartments." With it had passed the only private dwelling on that street, elbowed out at last by the none too gentle progress of an ancient but perhaps not honorable profession.

Julia misunderstood the look of purified contentment on Nina's face. "Well? What did you find?"

The girl dropped into a hot, overstuffed chair, and balanced her hat on her knee. She was jolted back into consciousness. This had started as a work-hunting trip.

"Find? Oh! Nothing, Mother. That place in the paper was a cashier's job in a movie house on Twenty-eighth Street. An awfully cheap place, and I'd have to sit outside in a little box, and such rough people came up. I watched for a little while."

"You're choosey, aren't you?"

"But, Mother, I didn't think you'd want me to work there. Or Dad — "

"You've got yourself to think about," hedged Julia.

The girl had taken her mother's relapse into that pristine sharpness as a matter of course. "I'll go back, if you think I ought to. It's open yet," she said contritely, though with no enthusiasm.

"Did you stop in to see your Uncle Thomas?" Julia encountered.

Nina drew a quick breath, and an expression of startled fear widened her eyes. "Oh. Oh, dear. I must have left it somewhere — " She shuffled the church pamphlets as if

she expected to find the object she sought hidden among them.

"What?" prodded Julia eagerly.

"A book Uncle Thomas gave me. All about jobs for women. He said if I read it through, I'd have some idea how to start out."

"A book about jobs," laughed the other derisively. "That's a fine way to get work. Out of a book. As if it isn't bad enough from the newspapers. You're better off if you lost it. And that was all he had to offer? Did he say anything about an allowance, or at least a little help?"

"I couldn't, Mother. Honestly. I just couldn't open the subject. Even though I promised to."

"Of course not! Of course, you couldn't talk to him about money. Who paid his way through college — just so some saloon-keeper's wife, who is twenty years older than he, could turn his head?"

"I thought her husband was a brewer," interpolated Nina, finding more immediate interest in the facts than in their significance.

"What's the difference, except money? But now you can't ask him for help, when we're in need. Oh, no!"

Nina crossed the room to the couch where her mother lay stretched in a picturesque state of relaxation. The older woman had a plausible excuse now for wearing the black georgette crêpe underthings which her husband had despised, and she could not have been accused of neglecting the opportunity which the use of black apparel afforded her. The gauzy negligee carelessly thrown about her was of a variety featured in fashionable shops for the outfitting of fashionable mourners, but she declared she had made it herself, in the dressmaking school to which

she repaired every afternoon. The girl sat at the edge of the couch. Her mother's tirade had somehow been an accusation of undutiful behavior, and an affectionate caress quivered in her palm, if the other said but one word to release it.

"Are we really in need, Mother?"

"Well — how long can this last? How much do you think I got for the house with its old-fashioned woodwork and paneling and furniture, stylish thirty years ago? Your father never would agree to having it renovated. Maybe if it hadn't been for that snotty young doctor — "

"I hate that word, Mother," cried the girl. "Guess I'll take a bath."

She went into the alcove which served as their bedroom. The apartment they occupied now was in all details of structure and situation precisely like her father's office in the other house. It was technically just one room and kitchenette but because of the alcove they enjoyed some of the comfort of two rooms. The walls were wainscoted halfway up. The mantel was supported by tortuous columns of wood, framing a black marble fireplace, no longer of practical use. A smaller mantel topped the mirror, flanked in turn by wooden battlements, tiers, and terraces in familiar arrangement.

Only a double bed, a dresser, and a chest of drawers stood in the alcove where, in his own home, Mark had kept his examining table, and out in the spacious room itself, instead of a ponderous mahogany desk, bookcases, and mahogany instrument cabinets, stood the regulation furniture. A three-piece, gorged tapestry suite, a table with a strip of tapestry framed under glass, an extra

couch, another chest of drawers, a few odd chairs. The washroom facing the back yard, which in the other house the doctor had reserved for his exclusive use, was here converted into a kitchenette. The apartment boasted no bath. That was a community institution, at the head of the stairs leading to the floor above.

The whole was not quite cheerful, yet not quite oppressive. A rental of ninety dollars per month included gas, electricity, bed linen, towels, and maid service. Of course, by retaining some of their old furniture, they might have had a three-room flat in the Bronx or a cheaper district, but Julia wanted to be close to what she called "things."

Nina continued her train of thought as she undressed. That her mother cherished a hatred for the strange young physician who had bought the good will of her father's practice, she found both amusing and unjust. He had been one of several to answer the advertisement in a medical weekly, but instead of buying the house and its contents outright, he had shown preference for the clientele alone. He was not to be blamed. In a former generation, a physician had not dared lift his eyes to success before he had encased himself in brownstone and provided all these other accouterments which Julia now hoped to sell at a good price. Styles change in every field of human activity, and Wyndram's equipment possessed no market value. The old examining table with its black oilcloth pads was as obsolete as the mahogany instrument cabinets and the boarded-up plumbing. The modern healer's domain is a fairyland of glass and metal and tile, and no doubt the young graduate had his private notion of this gleaming state of asepsis, to which the late doctor's sanctum bore

no resemblance. In addition to the vague commodity called good will, the young man desired only those two sacred pictures without which no physician seems able to fulfill the spirit of his oath.

Nina missed the pictures now, — "The Lesson in Anatomy," and Fox's "The Doctor." She missed her father's books too, sold to a dealer and probably adorning a dozen different second-hand book troughs. Julia had converted everything into cash, even their clothing, except such articles as they might safely wear during mourning without offense to the dead, or, if the truth were told, to the living. A few of the old trinkets might at least have made this seem like home. Julia was determined to uproot the old life, but she had discarded it too soon for Nina, who longed not only for her father's companionship but for a revival of the warmth and interest of those last few months.

Julia mentioned Mark only in connection with their much flaunted financial difficulties, or as the author of all their trouble. There were no half-glad, half-tearful references to the dead man, no anecdotal reminiscences, no exchange of confidences between mother and daughter. Mark was dead, and so far as Julia was concerned — why, he was dead. That was that. And if, at night, when she stretched out in bed, she felt her widowhood to be deeper than the mere raiment of sorrow, she gave no sign. Satisfied that she had done her best, as indeed she had, she believed no further discussion necessary.

"Better pick up that dress," Julia warned, pointing to the garment Nina had dropped, stepping out of it as one would out of a black puddle. The puddle was left behind, of course — for Mary to pick up, but there was no

Mary here. "It's the last you'll get of that kind for a long time."

The girl stooped to obey. All her clothing bore testimony to her mother's habit of spending as much money as possible on fragile and perishable articles, that she might wring further funds out of the provider when these were discarded. Her argument was that if she put money into lasting purchases, she could not spend nearly so much. Nina's dainty pumps were the best made for youthful feet. The sheer hose were priced in inverse proportion to their weight. Her silk envelope, tinted like her own original skin, and clinging to her in the moisture of her own body heat, had been fashioned to order.

The telephone outside the door rang. It was a public slot-machine intended for the use of all occupants of the house, but the majority of incoming calls were for Julia. The girl dived into a kimono, but her mother reached the instrument first. She was adept at these sleight-of-hand performances. Wherever she happened to be, or whatever she was doing, she managed to get the receiver off its hook before the second ring. She had developed a telephone manner, too, of talking very softly, and saying nothing which another might understand.

"Hello? — Oh, hello! — Yes — Who? Oh, yes — Not before seven. I'm sure I have it. Spell it. — Why, if she calls me. Good-by."

There was a gleam in her eyes when she returned. "I'm going out, Nina. I'll leave you a dollar for your dinner."

"Who was it, Mother? Somebody I know?"

"No. I'm getting an order for an evening cloak. I think they'll let me make it at the school. Don't wait up for me. I may be late."

Without actively doubting her word, Nina thought it marvelous that Mother should be getting work so soon. She presumed that the school of dressmaking and millinery had recommended her. Of course she had always shown good taste, a knack for color combinations and not a little originality in designing her own clothes. And she was skilled in the rudiments of sewing.

It happened that every time the girl answered the telephone, a man called. On such occasions Julia did not know who the man might be, though he left his name, usually a first name. Once Nina was sure the voice at the other end was Bingle's, the more so because he made no sign of recognition. Bingle would do a thing like that. At any rate, Julia had certainly plunged into some venture which necessitated these mysterious night errands to persons and places unknown.

Nina did not mind the loneliness very much, except in those few moments between the time she extinguished the lights and the point at which she fell asleep. She possessed unlimited resources for the enjoyment of her own company. That night, however, she had an unexpected caller, Burton Fiske, aged seventeen. She was fully dressed again, except for the absence of footgear, and she lay on her stomach reading, and waving her bare heels rhythmically in the air. In the matter of self-consciousness, she was four years old, not seventeen. She merely rolled around on her back, laughed up at him, sat up, crossed her legs and left her skirt twisted tightly about her thighs.

"Hello, Burt! How's Emma? Why didn't you bring her along? I haven't seen her since that day she came after my father died. You know when I mean."

"Yes. That was the day I first met you. I didn't know I was coming, though, to-night. I just passed by," he fibbed, "and thought I'd come in. Gee, it's hot."

"That was nice of you. I'm alone to-night too. Sit down, Burt. Here — " She patted the sofa on which she sat.

There were dozens of Burton Fiskes pictured in the high-school yearbooks of the city. Tall, toughened and yet rendered agile by athletics, he wore his white flannels with a dashing assurance also reflected in his free stride, his clean-cut features, squarish jaw, nice brown eyes, and smooth brown hair. Not for a moment since his entrance had he permitted his eyes to stray from the figure of the girl he was visiting. Burt was going to enter art school in the fall.

"Say — let's go for a walk," he said.

She screwed up an otherwise neat little nose. "Too hot."

"We could stop somewhere for a frap. There's that swell Italian joint around the corner," he urged.

"No, I tell you what. Let's sit outside on the stoop. I used to do that in our own house. We'll take cushions. Though it's nice and cool to sit on the stone. Oh!" in dismay. "I'll have to put shoes on."

She regarded her bare feet accusingly. The boy's gaze followed suit, and he flushed and giggled when she began to curl her toes, like one who sits at the edge of the sea and dabbles in the water.

"Ah, don't put on shoes," he said.

"I can't go out like this," she laughed, pattering into the bedroom. Training rather than an inner need for privacy prompted her to close the rolling doors, and in a few

moments she emerged fully clad for the street. What was more natural than for the boy to watch for the change? By this concession Nina had succeeded in accomplishing the effect she thought she ought to avoid. Beneath the sheen of feather-weight silk, her legs, especially the knees and instep, assumed the aspect of nudity.

"Say — will you pose for me some day?" the boy blurted out. "After school begins."

"I'd love to. Only you must give me the picture."

They sat one step down, so they might use the top for an elbow rest. It was Nina's belief that they ought to keep as far apart as possible, because she was afraid of blocking the entrance. Burt wanted to sit close, very close, and he did. She was a girl as Nature had intended girls to be, with hips and a waistline and breasts, with a cool, white throat which was noticeable for reasons other than that it connected a fine head with fine shoulders; and the boy could not be blamed for recognizing these facts, even if she had no consciousness of them. He discovered that the merest touch on her skin left a distinct outline of his finger tips, it was so sensitive and creamy, and he proceeded now to leave new marks on her wrists and arms as soon as the old faded. She considered it rather childish sport, and protested feebly only because it was hot. She didn't object to the proximity. The boy was very spick and span, and had used some fragrant powder after shaving.

"I wish that light would go out," he grumbled, indicating the street arc planted directly before them.

Her answer was, "Look at all the bugs around it. Aren't they silly, poor things!"

"It would be much nicer over at Riverside," he hinted.

Though far from being stupid, Nina could not possibly have understood. Her knowledge of sex was academic, something connected with the reproductive process of the frog in second-term biology. Despite the vast area she had covered in her reading, the information thus acquired bore no relation to her life as she lived it. If she had any definite conception of that important phase of experience, she drew no analogies between that conception and this boy who had not read nearly as much as she had. She discovered his deficiency in the first ten minutes.

Conversation dragged. With the poise born of this very artlessness, Nina was usually able to talk freely, but Burt Fiske seemed disinterested in the topics she suggested. A man returning to the house stopped below them, ostensibly to light a cigarette. He seemed to be having a hard time, for he struck one match after another, and kept looking up at her over the top of the tiny flame. Expansive, eager, yet wistful, she smiled at him. Burt rose to let him pass.

"Who was that?" he asked, resuming his place. Quickly, as if he hoped to disarm her, he twined his fingers about hers so that their palms touched.

"I suppose he lives here."

"You acted like he was a very good friend," he said sulkily.

"Did I? I never saw him before."

The boy pressed his hold tighter. Nina was no more stirred than at an ordinary handshake. "I bet you're a swell dancer," he murmured, slipping his free arm around her waist. "We're going to have a couple of dances at school. In costume."

"I won't be dancing for a long time yet." She squirmed against that arm, now drawing tighter and tighter.

"Oh, it's not as warm as you're complaining it is, all the time," he cried. Then drawing her to him, he kissed her squarely on the lips. Only the abruptness of his ardor astonished her.

"That wasn't at all necessary," she pointed out, her voice devoid of rancor.

The man came out again to smoke. Suddenly Nina was absorbed in her own thoughts, detached, aloof. Man and boy had ceased to exist for her.

VI

In the kitchen at the dark end of the long flat, Maria Calucci, the doctor's sister and manager of his celibate household, proceeded feverishly with her preparations for a dinner guest. The doctor, just about ready for the first of his evening patients, paused for a moment to extract the last measure of amusement from his sister's agitation. The preparation of one of these state dinners was an emotional effort for Maria, rather than a culinary one, and at that instant she directed her tirade against Francesca, the one maid-servant, for having forgotten to prepare a certain pastry filling necessary for the occasion.

Why — the Doctor Holzmann might never grace their table again if his favorite dainty were not served! And hadn't Cesca been told a million times that the Doctor Holzmann preferred ripe olives to green? And then there were the glasses. The Signor Doctore himself (meaning Calucci) would kill Cesca, would murder her, would grind her body to little pieces, and then discharge her, if she set out the green glasses instead of the clear crystal. He'd send her out into the cold world where other mistresses were not as kind to lazy snails like Francesca, as she, the doctor's sister, was.

Maria Calucci was that anomalous creature, an Italian spinster, and old, quite old, as age is reckoned in her own country, almost thirty. Except for her relationship to the doctor, she would have found herself beneath the scorn

of that East Harlem quarter where, not only as physician but as lawyer, judge, disciplinarian, diplomat, educational adviser, and marriage promoter, her brother reigned.

But Maria was tall as her brother, and broad, and for her part she did not see where the others could claim superiority. They were stringy, like hanks of unbleached homespun, gray and rough to the touch. Her hair had retained its virgin gloss, its blackness. Watching her, one could be reasonably certain that she had not lacked for suitors. She cherished her freedom too, and certainly Doctor Calucci supplied her with more of this desirable commodity than the most liberal husband of her own race would have considered sensible.

Shamelessly she gloried in her condition by disclaiming even the desire for wedded bondage. Being a man of antimarital tastes himself, Calucci conceived of no good reason why she should alter her status. Neither had an older brother, practicing medicine in Rome, taken any legal steps to date toward providing the family with accredited heirs.

The doctor ran a pocket comb through his immaculate hair, and opening the double doors which separated waiting room from office, presented himself to his patients.

Those hours between eight and ten in the morning, and six and eight in the evening took on the character of an audience with the king. People did not straggle in at any moment during the time he was officially at home. They came before the appointed hour to be on hand for just this moment, when Calucci should open the doors, and, like a royal host, greet his petitioners, each and every individual in turn, by name. To the strangers, he introduced

himself. The formalities over, he became jovial, recounted an expurgated joke or two for the consumption of mixed sexes, roughed it up a bit with the little boys, but kept his distance from the girls, however young. He knew his countrymen's attitude toward the untouchability of the female.

In the bare room with its gay linoleum floor, mission furniture, and cheap prints of religious subjects, sat the aristocracy as well as the peasantry of the neighborhood. "Il Progresso Italiano," on the center table, had not been touched, and never was, though Francesca put it at that precise angle every evening. Beside it, the ash tray fashioned of cigar bands framed under a glass plate enjoyed a shade more popularity than did the newspaper. Occasionally, one of the young bloods who had been educated in an American school dared smoke a cigarette.

Women who possessed hats and gloves wore them, as they would do to church or to a funeral. In the absence of such affluence, the others wore fresh shawls, or at least clean aprons. Under the force of the electric chandelier, many bare heads glistened, made darkly iridescent by the application of olive oil. Children in full regalia of shoes and stockings chafed under the unwonted discipline. The men toyed with their hats, trying ineffectually to appear at ease in their Sunday clothes.

Calucci led the way for a young matron, preparing now to discharge her fifth obligation to Our Lady the Madonna. Her husband followed her. Once past those doors the most fastidious and intelligent patient could have found no fault with the doctor's equipment, the finest at the disposal of the general practitioner.

Antonio Calucci, a native of Milan, had received his

medical degree from the university in the same city. Immediately after, he and his sister had come to New York to collect a joint inheritance left by an uncle with the family attitude toward marriage. Letters of introduction to several physicians here enabled Calucci to visit a number of hospitals, and to get a comprehensive view of professional conditions in this country. Impressed by the opportunities offered, especially to the beginner, he decided to remain. Maria, then nineteen, gladly linked her destiny with his. Their parents were dead. There was only the brother in Rome.

Not so much through wisdom, as for genuine love of his people, Calucci settled in the district called by slummers "Little Italy." With the generous sum recently collected, and the income which both he and Maria received monthly from their parents' estate, he could have managed a very fine establishment elsewhere. He preferred his own people, and two days a week gave his services gratis to a hospital nearby. He had done much, in fact, to popularize that institution among his patients who required hospital care. Yet the real measure, not only of his services but of the confidence granted him, was the decrease of neighborhood midwifery during those nine years.

Into this atmosphere still redolent of garlic, perspiration and yellow soap, despite the open window, came Holzmann. The last of Calucci's patients had gone, and he stood before the mirror combing his hair again, probably for the twentieth time that day.

"Take off that white coat," was Holzmann's greeting. "You look like a barber."

"My people like verra much this coat," chuckled the

other, but he motioned his guest into the office, and there obligingly changed into a more acceptable garment.

With an air of disgust, Holzmann glanced over his shoulder, as if he had confounded the odor with those responsible for it.

"If you had sense, you would get out of this. It's a hole in the wall. Phew! A dump. You have enough confinements in one year to be a specialist long ago."

"Always you talk 'specialist.' Like a new married man. He have wife. He think everybody else need wife too. *Some one* got to be general doctor. I enjoy when different cases come to me. One this kind, one other kind." He pulled the scarlet and gold bell-rope, a note of dissension in the tiled room so strongly flavored with disinfectant. *"Vino,* Doctore. Wait a minute. Something special before we eat."

While waiting for Francesca, Calucci asked a favor of his friend. Lifting the mattress of the couch, he disclosed beneath it a matted layer of paper money, certainly several hundred dollars, at a superficial estimate. Holzmann growled.

"Why in hell don't you open a bank account like all human beings?"

"Oh, I got plenty bank account. Too much trouble to run down every week."

"You're crazy. With the windows open, and people coming in, you keep money under a mattress."

"Nobody steal from me, Otto. Yesterday, two men come here, bad men. How you say — jail pigeons? Oh — jailbirds. They tell me they fix Isabella's husband if he try to shoot me like he say. All bad men my friend. Otto, put my money in your bank. When I need it, I ask for it."

Francesca appeared with the wine on a silver tray. The two men made themselves comfortable. Holzmann, who had been very tired when the day's work was done, brightened perceptibly at the sight of the new delicacy. Calucci poured the honey-colored drink into the fragile, blown glasses. The other tasted a sip of it, then with a sigh of contentment, settled back, his legs thrust out, and his spine at a most unhygienic angle to the chair.

"What do you call this, Tonio?"

"It seems it got no name. Priest bring it to me last week."

"Next time I come you'll be in church, I suppose," sarcastically.

"Priest say I do good, so he give me wine. He send money to some monks in Italy, and get wine for present. Nobody else make it. It looks like Benedictine but taste different. When bottle empty, I give it to Signora Holzmann. She tell me once she like queer bottles. This one pretty — eh?"

"More junk around the house," muttered the bridegroom of nine months.

For an interval no words were exchanged. The men sat enveloped in friendly silence, broken occasionally by the gurgle of amber fluid against the fluted neck of the stone jug. It was one of those days in late September when the climate of New York had turned atavistic, reverting to July. From outdoors there floated in the mingled sounds of lazy street activity, laggard footsteps, hesitant laughter, sporadic singing. To the two wine-drinkers, the world's activity seemed remote. Calucci drank two glasses to his friend's one, but in spite of the discrepancy, both exhibited characteristic reactions. The

Latin was growing red and jolly; his guest morose, blasphemous. If Holzmann invented no new oaths, at least he grouped the known ones in such original manner as to make his private speech a guide to new uses for old invectives. Having relieved himself of the burden, he subsided. Once, when his host refilled the glasses, he said:

"It couldn't be better in heaven."

Calucci threw back his head and laughed. "Heaven! What's in heaven? Nothing. This world always better. Who wants to go to heaven? Only babies good enough. Big people too wicked. Whole heaven full of babies under a year old. Diapers hang on the lines, all over. If sometime, maybe man or lady stumble into heaven, what is there for him to do? Play harp? Drink fine wine? See old friend? No! Gotta make bottles for babies, and wash diapers. All day long wash diapers. I like better to sit here — "

Undisturbed by comment from his listener, Calucci rambled on. Presently quiet fell between them again. There was a time when four men had assembled for these functions. Now, curiously enough, though never an intimate of Wyndram's, Bingle had ceased his advances since the death of the older man. Francesca tiptoed in to turn on the lights.

"See the Duchess lately?" asked Holzmann, referring to Julia.

"Oh — two, three weeks ago. She's verra busy lady."

"Busy!" snorted the other. "Fine business, for Mark's wife."

"Hats — dresses — sure, that's good trade."

The men exchanged a look, and with one accord broke into immoderate laughter, Calucci's gruff and resonant,

Holzmann's cackling, insinuating. The former began to sing loudly, in a good baritone voice always improved by wine. The German's inability to carry a tune did not prevent him from converting the performance into a duet.

Their amusement temporarily spent, Calucci continued precisely where he had left off. "I admire Signora Julia, admire her verra much. She is artist, I tell you, Otto. Some people paint great picture, some make great music, some artist with the forceps. She is great too. Wonderful. Big, strong, healthy woman, handsome too. She is artist."

"For my part, she can be a madam. She don't trouble me, and I don't trouble her. But what will become of the girl in such surroundings? Some day men will begin to come to the house. She'll be like her mother."

"You wrong, Otto — " Then the telephone rang. "Yes? Who is-a this?" called Calucci. "Oh — *Bambina?* How the Signora mother? Yes? You got a job? Fine! I stop in to see you some day. Fine. Good. Great. Good-by."

He turned back to Holzmann. "That's Nina. Funny just now we talk about her. I send her over to laboratory to get job. You know Slater, in Metropolitan Pathological Laboratories? Now she tell me he give her job for fifteen dollar. But you wrong, Otto. This girl have something inside — like a song. Something can't be spoiled."

"You talk like a damn fool. Wait until she begins to work — with men. Even women turn around to look at her. Something inside? Song? Bah! It's all outside."

"No, Doctore. Maybe I don't explain verra good. She be different from mother, oh, yes. Inside the character is better. She have Mark for father, remember."

VII

Unlike the ordinary girl of her age, Nina Wyndram cherished no secret ambition for the stage. Neither did she believe herself peculiarly suited to the career of a motion-picture star, an opera singer, a première danseuse, a sculptor, a writer, or a painter. She found no attraction in teaching, law, medicine, social service or the accumulation of academic degrees. During her father's illness she thought often of the nobility of nursing, but always with the reservation that it was lofty work for another, but rather distasteful to her. She had taken the college preparatory course in high school, because Dad had said she would go to college. And she supposed she would have fulfilled his wish, had he lived.

She knew very well what she did not want to do, but what she did want lay beyond definition. Though devoid of the hostile self-assurance of seventeen, yet Nina was by no means colorless. Her very vacillation was its own charm. She drew color and character and life from the uncertainty of her desires and, what was more unusual, she conveyed that color and sense of life with finer insistency than her aggressive contemporaries.

The instant Calucci suggested the Metropolitan Laboratories, the girl hailed the idea with high glee. She might have been searching for just such an opportunity, to judge by her avid delight. It fulfilled her craving for

something different. It was flavored with mystery, with responsibility, with authority.

After three weeks, she loved the laboratory, its smells, its sounds, its people; proportionally they responded to her. One gets as much out of such a place as one gives, and if chance is good, on certain days one may get a bit more. At the end of each nine hours of work Nina felt that the advantage was decidedly in her favor. She stored away new knowledge, explored new worlds, gained new skill, made new friends, animal and human. There was Rudie the zoo boy, and Charlotte the other routine worker, and Mrs. de Silvio, the old Negro bottle-washer, who had once been an animal tamer, and Doctor Slater the head, and then, of course, Doctor Penning.

They teased her about Doctor Penning, but she liked to have them do so. She felt, then, that she was accepted. It was pleasant to be in an intimate group, to have people know little intimate things about her, to feel privileged herself to remark on their affairs.

"Here comes Penning!" And everybody would scatter, leaving her alone in the clinical pathology room to receive the surgeon. Not malice, but a healthy mischievous pride in her clean-molded youth prompted them. She was one of those girls who stirred protective impulses in women as well as men, in those of her own age as well as her elders. The personnel of the laboratory adopted her, embraced her, babied her, gloried in her as if she were one of their biological products, without jealousy or snobbery. They were proud of the fact that Doctor Penning had noticed their new little girl, and with that unpedagogical lack of restraint which many fond parents exhibit, they took no pains to conceal their admiration.

"Say," said Rudie, who seemed to appropriate her more often, probably by some divine right of youth, "he'd have to be blind as a streptococcus not to play dead when she's around. I bet when he came in the first day she was here, he must of thought we just painted the place or something. It must of looked like two other laboratories."

"You're silly," Nina told him.

"The only reason Penning isn't known to the newspaper public, like Jevons, and Wechsler, and Hawkins," Slater volunteered another time, "is because he's too young. You see, for a surgeon, he's still in his childhood at thirty-one."

"Oh — is he that old?" countered Nina.

"Wait until you're nearly thirty yourself, kid," said Charlotte. "You won't be ready for platinum threads among the fourteen-carat. Not for a long time."

Nina thought she had stepped upon dangerous ground. A native tact prompted her explanation. "I didn't really mean that thirty-one is old. I thought he looked younger, about twenty-six or seven. But you're not nearly thirty, Charlotte."

"How old do you think I am?"

"Mm — twenty-two," said Nina honestly.

Charlotte took the girl's face between her hands and squeezed it. "You run up to the roof and play with the bunnies, Nina," she laughed. "Three new ones this morning."

"Just born? Why, Rudie never told me!"

Nina was gone, her heels on the cement floor tapping out in irregular code her eagerness to see the additions to the zoo. The Metropolitan Pathological Laboratories occupied a three-story building in the West Forties, with

animal huts on the screened roof. On the second floor, where trained chemists, all university men and women, conducted the manufacture of vaccines and therapeutic sera, a young collegian halted her hurried progress.

"You promised to visit my cubbyhole," he reminded her. "Here's your chance."

"Oh, I can't now. I'm frightfully busy," she protested, standing on one foot as if to keep the other free for flight the instant he released her.

"I'll do your work for you. Come on in."

"I'm going to see the baby rabbits."

"Are you the doctor?"

She whisked by him. A few golden tendrils of hair reached out and brushed his shoulder. He caught the flying tip of her white smock, and she strained away, laughing ruefully, but hesitating to hurt his feelings. They seemed to be posed in the figure of one of those simple folk dances of pursuit. And, as happens in the course of such dances, just when our swain considered his lady trapped, she eluded him.

"I'll walk you home," he called after her.

She answered, "All right."

At the last visible flirt of her heels on the iron stairs, the young collegian glanced down at his shoulder, half expecting to find some precious pollen where her hair had brushed him.

It was cold on the roof. Nina ran down the lane between the rows of galvanized zinc animal houses to the last one, the hospital. There she found Rudie. Called in turn zoo boy, director of zoölogical gardens, circus master, country gentleman, veterinarian and monkey matron, Rudie justified his crudity, in Nina's eyes, by an

amazing tenderness with animals. What boy has not stood before a bird store and vowed to own one when he grows up? That boy was Rudie, at twenty. He was down on his knees now, talking to the white rabbit mother, not in childish syllables such as most people employ in their conversation with pets, but in a series of clucks, gutturals, and sibilants. Some of these sounds he had learned from Mrs. de Silvio. The rest were his own invention.

"It's warm in here," said Nina.

"I should say," Rudie patted the steam pipe. "There's a lot of swell houses where they wouldn't have steam on a day like this. But this is a hospital; how about it, Lukie?"

The rabbit Lukie, short for Leucocyte, was, after additional palaver, persuaded to disclose her triplets. They were grotesque things, unreal, fantastic, impossible, just two long ears attached to lumps of pink dough. But Nina thought them wonderful. She used a word constantly on her lips during her short career as a self-supporting woman — "thrilling." They were thrilling, those ears in pink dough. Everything was thrilling. The laboratory was a thrilling place, replete with thrilling experiences.

One of them may have been this casual acquaintance with Doctor Judson Penning. If Nina derived any tremulous excitement from the fact that she had a dinner engagement with him for a date four days off, she thought of that reaction only as a thrill among many. She exercised no emotional discrimination. Mrs. de Silvio's account of how her troupe had exhibited before the King of Siam in 1870, with pictures to prove it too, was no less a novelty, perhaps even a greater one.

Returning to her own post, Nina found the laboratory

in that state of drowsiness she loved best. Usually the period fell at four o'clock, and marked a need for relaxation between the postprandial activity and the last spurt which completed the day's work. The interlude was a social one, for the exchange of interesting information, odd bacterial slides, small talk, and very often candy. At first Nina had revolted at the thought of eating in a room ornamented with tubes of blood, and glass jars of preserved tonsils, but appetite triumphed over daintiness. She called the array "specimens," as the others did, and the generalization helped to make the afternoon sweetmeats more delectable.

The physical center of gravity for the group on the first floor, Nina was also the conversational axle about which the social hour turned. Not that she did much talking. On the contrary, she was awed by the superior intellects about her. She made an ideal audience, did her listening with eyes and lips, and with her thin scarlet nostrils that dilated at each new verbal scent.

Consciousness of participation in the flux of life tingled in her veins. The centrifuge, that electrical dervish of the laboratory, seemed to whirl in greater frenzy at her touch, its bumble rising contentedly in rhythmic accompaniment to the human voices. Glassware seemed to tinkle more joyously. A guinea pig, bled in the morning for the next day's Wassermanns and not yet removed to the roof, peered out of its temporary wooden cage. It squealed incessantly, like a rubber toy. Two white mice which should have been torpid with pneumonia, chased each other up and down the miniature stairs in the doll's house provided for them. Precious white mice were not kept in the regular zoo. They escaped too easily. Rudie could chase rab-

bits and guinea pigs and monkeys and pups over the roof tops, but not mice.

Nina never got near them, pretty and odd as they were in their white fur coats. She was not afraid of mice, no, not exactly, but there was a story attached to her coldness, and she told it to the circle of loungers. It began with her father. He had had very advanced theories of education. Nina was to be courageous and steady of nerve. At the age of two, she was given an aseptic but unfortunately eupeptic mouse in a tricky cage to play with. The story ended by Nina exhibiting a red scar about an inch long between the thumb and forefinger. That was where the mouse had bitten her. Her hand was passed around, so to speak, by silent and unanimous consent of all present.

"Look at that hand," said Charlotte, grinning as if she had invented Nina. "Five and a half glove. Can you imagine?"

At intervals Nina popped out of the ring, to see if she could do anything for Doctor Slater, busy in the bacteriology room at the end of the hall. He was tall, slightly stooped, and cursed by a black, fast-growing beard. While this gave him the appearance of being constantly unshaven, it nevertheless lent to his face that pensive look associated with men who delve into alchemy in the high watch towers of science.

"Just in time," he said, turning to smile at her. "Bring me a flask, will you, Miss Wyndram?"

"What kind?"

"Einhorn — liter."

"Sterile?"

He nodded. She darted into the next compartment; the

rooms were hardly more than that. Her heart thrilled with joy. She had come just in time. A man with a doctor's degree in biochemistry had requested a flask. And she knew that there were different kinds of flasks! Life was thrilling. Who ever suspected, even a month ago, that each shape of bottle and tube and pipette in a laboratory had its own name?

"Something int'resting?" she ventured, returning.

Doctor Slater pursed his lips. "Nothing special. I don't know myself. Fiddling around."

Nina did not believe him. Of course he knew what he was doing. But she understood. She had heard Dad talk of such cases. A man must be careful not to permit facts of his research to get into the newspapers before he has amassed adequate proof. He might fall into ill repute with the profession. And again Nina trod the stars.

"Will you make up some carbo-fuchsin?" said Doctor Slater.

"That's for t. b.," she murmured to assure herself.

"Right," laughed the man.

As she gathered the materials, Nina repeated the formula for the stain, converting it by repetition into a sort of pæan of happiness. She watched Doctor Slater smear a particle of sputum on a glass slide with sterile, platinum loop. Then he heated it gently in the dark red solution she had just made, washed it, counter-stained it —

Finally, the process completed and his diagnosis made, he motioned to her to look into the microscope. It was the breathless moment for which she had waited. She shut one eye roguishly, as novices do, and bent over the instrument, adjusting the lenses. On a round blue field, she saw plainly the bacilli of havoc, long slender red rods. They might have

been dashes penciled in red crayon on blue paper. Some were bunched together, as if gossiping in a group. Other solitary rods held aloof. A few were curved, like scarlet threads blown from a tassel.

The sight was pretty but terrifying, fascinating yet horrible. Your true scientist feels no greater revulsion for a malignant microörganism than for a friendly one. But Nina was only a routine worker, not a scientist. Only a very young, impressionable girl with an enormous curiosity, and a sense of beauty which demanded fulfillment deeper than the visual.

She frowned at Doctor Slater. "Somebody has tuberculosis."

"Yes. Somebody's always having it."

"Who is it?"

"Remember that big jolly Scotchman who came in yesterday?"

She turned on him. "Oh, it can't be that man! There must be a mistake."

Distinctly annoyed, Doctor Slater took down a book of colored plates and opened it, suggesting a comparison.

"I didn't mean that," she apologized, "that you were wrong. I meant — Oh, Doctor Slater, how can a lot of little things like this destroy such a big man? He must be six feet tall, at least. And lively. He said he'd dance a jig for me the next time he came in. There are just little germs, such little nothings, without heads, or tails. You can't even measure them — "

"Oh, yes, you can," Slater assured her. He was always the student.

"How?" she demanded eagerly.

There ensued a lesson in microscopic measurements.

Nina took notes in a little black book. They laughed at the black book. She knew all the information was to be found in textbooks, but she couldn't drag around a pile of printed matter all the time. With the facts in handy form, she could review them on the morning ride down. She could not get out quite early enough to walk to the laboratory.

Later Nina resumed the subject. "Will you have to tell him that he has — that he's very sick?"

Slater failed to understand her concern, but she was an attractive bit of equipment around the place, and he encountered no special difficulty in answering her strange questions.

"No. We don't do that. Our business is to make the diagnosis and write a report to the doctor. He does the dirty work."

"That's good," she sighed.

She did not want him to become identified with the unpleasantness of the task.

The thought had never occurred to her that this had been *her* father's duty — to tell people of their illness.

VIII

"Doctor Penning on the telephone for Miss Wyndram," announced the girl at the switchboard.

Conversation was abruptly throttled, as if a paper bag had been exploded in the room.

"Oh, my — Doctor Penning on the telephone for Miss Wyndram," mimicked Rudie.

"Well — Doctor Penning on the telephone for Miss Wyndram," echoed Charlotte.

"Yeah — Doctor Penning on the telephone for Miss Wyndram," corroborated the first speaker, with an air of exaggerated innocence.

Nina suspected a joke. Every room in the building had an extension line. There was no need for the operator to pop in and shout the news for public consumption.

"I'm busy. I can't answer it," Nina said.

She was making capillary pipettes and, while she spoke, she began another. Her cheeks were flushed, partly from the heat of the gas flame, partly from the intensity she brought to the fascinating work. She did it prettily too, poking her tongue into her cheek when she held the length of the tubing in the blue flame to the point of fluidity; then catching her underlip between her teeth as, with a quick movement, she pulled at both ends of the glass, to spin it out to the desired length.

"There's no hurry about that," Slater told her. "Better not keep him waiting. He's a busy man."

It was no hoax, after all. Doctor Penning called on the telephone for Miss Wyndram, true enough. The fact was of less significance to Nina than to the others, since this was the day on which she was to take dinner with him.

In no sense could his explanation have been mistaken for an apology. The word "sorry" did not enter into the brief exchange. He would not be able to call for her at seven o'clock, as they had planned, but he was quite sure of coming at eight. There was to be a special operation at five. Something he could not postpone. However, he wanted her to promise that she would eat when she left the laboratory at five-thirty. A glass of milk or a sandwich, he suggested.

"Do that, will you?" he asked. "Don't spoil your appetite for a good dinner, though."

"I will if I feel like it," she said. "Sometimes I'm not hungry until eight."

"This isn't really a request. It's an order."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of doctors," she laughed back.

That evening Nina rode home in the subway. Her mother was putting the finishing touches to a handsome black lace gown. Nina never saw these beautiful clothes being cut, basted or fitted. Only the sewing-in of the snapper and of a flower ornament was done in her presence.

"You're just in time to help me get into this," said Julia, biting off the last thread. She continued to talk as she slipped the garment over her head, and Nina gave vent to "oh's" and "ah's" of admiration. "No, the ribbons go under the loop; that's it. Now this crosses over — wait a moment, it's caught. You'll find milk and butter

out on the fire escape. There's sardines and bread and a few other things in the closet."

"I'm going to have dinner in a restaurant to-night, Mother, with Doctor Penning."

"Who?"

"Don't you remember? I told you — "

"Oh, yes. Did you find out anything about him?"

"Doctor Slater says he's fairly well known in the profession."

Julia clicked her teeth impatiently. "I mean — where's he got his office and so forth?"

"Oh, no."

Julia regarded her daughter shrewdly.

"Honestly not, Mother. I'm not keeping anything from you. You look marvelous — "

"Bring me my coat — that one on the bed."

"Oh — you've got a new one!" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes. I bought it to-day at a great bargain. A hundred-dollar coat for one third the price."

Nina nodded, a shade of wistfulness in her manner. No new clothes had been bought for her since Wyndram's death. She was not covetous. On the contrary, she gloried at seeing her mother in queenly attire, yet looked forward with a certain longing to the day when Julia should have her own shop. Julia understood and hastened to make a gracious offer.

"If you want to wear that hat I made last week," she said, "try it on. It ought to fit you. I got it a little too tight for my head."

"You mean that gorgeous one with the marcasite ornament?" eagerly.

"Yes."

"I know it fits," Nina answered repentantly. "I — I did try it on yesterday."

She had the bandbox down and was tugging at the strings before her mother was gone. For half an hour she amused herself, strutting before the mirror with the hat at different angles, wearing other articles of Julia's clothing, all too big, and inspecting the bureau drawers for new, hidden purchases. Before their change of circumstances, Nina had known no problem of clothes. They had flowed into her closets in a steady stream. She had only to say she wanted a dress. More often Julia, who studied the junior styles, had bought the particular garment before Nina expressed the desire.

In a few months of this recent condition her mother called poverty, Nina had learned how much one might spend on accessories alone, laces, belts, collars, handbags — the trinkets she had once possessed by the pound. More than the lack of these luxuries, the necessity to think about them made Nina's expectation of relief so sharp. It was a nuisance to remember that she must not wear the ruffled dress at the laboratory, because the smock crushed it. The one-piece crêpe-de-chine was cheaper and more serviceable. Julia's course was to last six months. Then all such worries would be banished.

At seven o'clock, Nina remembered with a start that Doctor Penning was coming. She had an hour to bathe and dress. An hour was a long time, for one whose wardrobe consisted of two one-piece garments, two stockings and two shoes. She reflected that she might even have time to read a story. Flinging off her clothes, she wrapped herself in a kimono and peeped warily out into the hall. At the top of the stairs lay her objective, a white door bearing

the attractive legend "Bath Room," done in black paint on white cardboard.

Nina tiptoed to the foot of the stairs. In the crook of her arm, under a bath towel, she carried a magazine. The kimono was a real Japanese one, without buttons or other means of fastening, and when she walked, the folds parted. In utter unconcern, Nina sat down on the bottom step, bare knees protruding, her skin oddly luminous in the pale light of a small, frosted electric bulb. Fifteen people owned a share in that bath. Nina heard at least half a dozen of them open their doors.

From behind six cracks created by the partial opening of six doors, as many pair of snapping eyes cast greedy glances upon the same sign. As many pair of ears were turned to catch the sounds of departure of the present incumbent. As many pairs of slippered feet were poised to dash for the goal. Six towels hung suspended over six arms, and the same number of brains were devising harsh and unladylike epithets to be privately applied to the girl from the top floor front. She worked only until four-thirty and really ought to take her bath earlier, the others thought.

Now, Nina had had no training in coöperation of this particular variety, familiar to every apartment dweller. She had grown up in a small family. Their old house had boasted two baths, and several niches containing marble washbasins. Whenever Nina had wanted running water, she had had it. Now she wanted it, and with that shrewdness sometimes found in the most ingenuous, she meant to get her bath soon. She felt especially in need of one to-day, having helped take a dozen gross of test tubes out of their soiled paper wrappings.

Miss Fourth-Floor-Front was fumbling with the key from the inside of the bathroom. Throughout the house, the air bristled as if many flashing spears had been thrust out of ambush. Somewhere a man cleared his throat. A solitary man in the fray! Then the culprit in a dark blue corduroy robe stepped out, glancing around archly to insure private progress to her room. Instantly a door creaked. Feet scampered down halls. But there was Nina, and nobody reckoned on her.

Swiftly, noiselessly, lightly she glided upstairs. In a flash, in a twinkle, she darted by. With a blur of purple and gold, and soft-tinted embroidery, she confounded the vigilantes, dizzied them, paralyzed them. Before they knew what it was that had whizzed through the air, whether bat, cat or bird, they found the white door with its neat legend once more slammed in their faces.

Out of the ant hill swarmed the insects caught off guard by the flip of Nina's dainty heel.

"This is a public outrage!" cried a thin woman in a batik negligee. She made a gesture calculated to inflame the mob to revolt.

"Who was it?" demanded the ingénue of forty.

"The princess from downstairs," returned a collection of pink ruffles.

"I mean to protest!" added the first speaker, forthwith stepping up to the door and rattling the knob. In solid phalanx the women's crusade surged around its leader.

"Do it again," came the order.

Nina thought it rude for them to keep pounding at the door that way. She had turned on the shower and, protecting her hair with a blue rubber helmet fastened by a fetching strap, she stepped out of her kimono. Head

thrown back, arms outstretched, she submitted to the battering cascade with joyous abandon. She capered in and out of the column of water, flexed her muscles, balanced on her toes, reached up and up, as if to catch in midair on her finger tips the flashing, elusive drops. Opalescent beads of water dripped from her small breasts and rounded knees, trickling down the fine curve of her legs. Again and again Nina caught her breath at the shock of contact.

"Oh, this is good — oh — oh!" she panted, her laugh ringing out in solitary enjoyment.

"She's laughing at us, for being such fools," announced the girl scout in batik, her ear to the door.

Another, with long, painted finger nails repeated for the tenth time that she had a date. A large bulbous woman, bottle of reducing tablets in hand, was trying to induce a pale little person from the country to use a few of the wonder workers in her bath. At the same time, while exchanging pleasantries with her neighbor, each member of the female guard shifted closer to the strategic point.

Nina had turned off the shower. They could hear that.

"Would you mind hurrying?" called the ingénue.

The girl inside considered it vulgar to shout through closed doors, especially when one was engaged in the personal matter of bathing. And annoying too.

"You know this isn't your private suite," shrilled the pink ruffles.

Nina failed to hear this last shot. She had released a torrent of hot water from the faucet. When the tub was filled, she opened her magazine. As her body relaxed under soothing warmth, she pillowed her head on the porcelain rim of the tub, and read on.

An indolence like the lassitude of the tropics permeated

every fiber of her being. Beneath the unruffled surface of the water, in which a dozen reflections of the light hung suspended like floating golden buoys, she lay calm, placid as one of those dainty figures imprisoned in Venetian glass. The peculiar greenish tint of the water gave to her girlish form the same fragility which the art of the glass blower gives to those other figures. But there was a vitality about Nina, a soft resilient vitality foreign to the brittleness of glass. She lay quite still. Just her eyes moved with the hurried pace of her story, and at intervals her white dripping hand, to turn a page.

At this juncture, the single male combatant joined the group. He came downstairs whistling, manlike expecting to find the bathroom unoccupied, merely because he wanted it so. He pulled up shortly before the regiment of disarray. Even modesty was forgotten in the face of a common grievance. Only the little country girl fumbled in embarrassment with the bit of cheap lace at her throat.

"Somebody in there?" was his obvious question.

The chorus replied.

"Who is it?" asked the new recruit.

The chorus replied. One voice rose higher. "If you complained about her being in there for almost an hour, Mrs. Miller would come up and get her out."

"Not much," said he who had once watched Nina over the flame of a match. "Not me. I've got lots of time," and redraping his towel, he turned deserter.

To Nina, time and space had ceased to exist. Nothing was real except the magazine. She had not reached the age of literary discretion. The printed word in any form held her attention, and the shoddy workmanship in this story interfered in no way with her absorption. Shortly

after eight, a mighty crash almost split the panels of the door. Mrs. Miller's voice boomed out.

"There's others that need this room. Besides, a gentleman's waiting for you downstairs. I let him in."

A gentleman! Penning! Instantly she stepped from the cooling water and began briskly to dry herself. Only a charmed life could have survived the unspoken darts hurled after her. Judson Penning was sitting under the lamp with the atrocious silk saddle for a shade. He looked up, his eyes a vacuous blue. They might have belonged to a professional gambler, a financier, a detective, or to any man whose place in life demanded inscrutability of feature.

"Oh, I'm late," said Nina. "I'm sorry. I'll be dressed in a minute."

He rose. He was tall and squarely built, and already his eyes were losing that bottomless look, as if the emptiness were being filled with impressions. He had seen Nina only in the white laboratory smock, or in black. She stood very straight from the waist up, breasts elevated, arms folded behind her. Her hair curled upwards, crisply yet softly like golden hyacinth petals. A warm, moist fragrance emanated from her body, like that subtle lure exercised by a person in slumber.

IX

A FEW weeks later, Nina and Judson Penning sat at dinner in one of those large, fashionable hotels, where the waiters seem especially ordained for their task by some higher authority, especially consecrated from birth for a life of service.

"You were a funny youngster," he said, looking straight at her.

She laughed out of sheer radiance. "When?"

"That first day you came to Slater's. When you said 'My Dad was a doctor.'" He recaptured the plaintive inflection of her voice with diverting accuracy. "I suppose you thought I'd be kinder to you."

"I felt so foolish. I didn't know what to say," she confessed. "They had no right to introduce me when I couldn't open my eyes to look at you. You know, I'd been poking my face into all sorts of bottles and baskets and boxes, like Benjamin Franklin's cat."

"Or Pandora."

"I hope I didn't do as much damage as that."

"You might have — to yourself."

"Really? The papers talked so much about bromine during the war. When I saw the bottle I wanted to get a whiff, at least a tiny little whiff."

"Bromine, of all things!"

"There was worse-smelling stuff. But they didn't have to bother you just because you were in the building. I'd

have been all right. Only I couldn't open my eyes, and it burned."

"Of course it did."

"You saw enough of gas in France?"

He waived the question by showing her a pathetic note which a seven-year-old boy in the hospital had sent him that morning. Constantly Nina's eyes strayed about the vast dining room, now resting on the swaying couples in the center, now on the famous jazz band at the other end. Each table was lit by its own soft-shaded lamp. The single top chandelier shed its amber glow only over the island of floor space roped in for dancing, and set apart thus in a sea of semi-darkness, the dancers seemed like figures moving inside a huge hollow cube of amber glass.

Once, when shifting colors played upon the rustling throng, Nina said, "Floating opals.

"I'm sorry I'm not dancing," she told him. "But I can't — yet. I can't seem to make myself."

"You'd get small pleasure out of dancing with me. It's a long time since I've felt like that."

"I don't believe you," she teased.

"You may as well. I'm not the sort of man who's hypocritical about his accomplishments."

"Do you think people ought to be proud of such things?"

"Not proud. But they ought to admit their own talents, once they recognize them. Modesty of the other sort has the odor of humility."

Nina was smiling to herself. "You know, I remember the first time I heard the story of Pandora. I must have been five. Dad had come home and put a little package on the table. I opened it — "

"Poking into bromine even at that age?"

She nodded. "There were a lot of little capsules in the box. Fascinating things. In a second I discovered you could open them and pour all the powder out in little black mounds on the white tablecloth."

Penning pursed his lips as if to whistle. Then he remembered where he was. "And then Dad woke up?"

"He certainly did. He told me about Pandora. And showed me a picture of her in the book. I remember it so well. She had pretty little wings. Oh, do you know that picture? And for weeks afterward, I used to climb out of bed and secretly study my back for signs of sprouts."

Nina peered up at her companion, a trifle saucily, a trifle timidly, seeking to penetrate the reserve within those blue eyes. She found him boyishly craning his neck, peeping over the top of her shoulder as if, himself, to search for similar indications.

"I don't see any."

"Do you think I'll ever have them?" she parried.

"No," he answered instantly.

"I'd love to. I'm sure I would."

"There's always that danger — of having them clipped."

"You have to be careful not to be caught."

"All of us are, sooner or later. I suppose it's just as well. There's danger in flying too high."

"Like you do in dreams," chuckled Nina. "Then what a flop."

"I suspected you were young enough for such dreams."

"You know when I had a birthday last. I didn't conceal my age."

"But there are eighteens and eighteens."

"Well — I'm one of 'em. I had a terrible dream once. I

was out in an open boat — no, let's not talk about dreams. Here's the fish."

The waiter placed a covered silver platter before Judson Penning. By this time Nina had got over her amusement at his skill in carving and serving. She had read, of course, that it was eminently proper for a man to perform these rites, but in her own circle she had not seen it done.

"My mother," he explained to her once, "has clung to the old-fashioned way of having the man of the house preside at meals. And Mrs. Kent, my housekeeper, insists that I keep up the convention. They *will* make a gentleman of me, although I want to be something else."

"A surgeon?"

"A good one," he added boyishly.

Now he said, "Shall we eat it filet or cross-section?"

"Filet."

The waiter removed the cover, disclosing a graceful striped fish, lying in its entirety on a bed of lettuce. Accustomed to men with deft hands, yet Nina liked to watch Penning's fingers, firm and steady, especially in smaller movements. His eyes were bent on his work, for that was his way — to look directly at the person or thing of momentary interest, with no hint of divided attention. He did not speak until he had finished. Then he said:

"This is a holiday for me. Enjoying yourself?"

He asked her this question often, as if he, on his part, felt a mystery to be solved in her behavior.

"Marvelously," she answered. "But you won't think I'm impolite or complaining if I tell you something? I like that Italian place with the three queer musicians better. I mean the one we went to on my birthday."

The fact was that Nina had not quite recovered from the wonder of that day, now two weeks behind her. Because it had promised to be a dreary one, every ordinary incident, in retrospect, had assumed the glory of a miracle. While her father lived, her birthday had been a great occasion, the one day in the year when he put on full evening dress. One of the regular gifts had been a new party frock, and after office hours, with Julia in evening gown also, the Wyndrams had gone off in a taxi to a grown-up restaurant of Nina's choosing. This year Julia had remembered to give Nina a dress, a pretty confection of black gauze sprinkled with touches of lilac, but she gave no hint of following the old custom to its finish.

By chance, Judson Penning called on the telephone at about six o'clock that evening, when Nina sat munching crackers and sardines, and reading "Jean Christophe." In a burst of confidence she told him of her loneliness, of the new hat and dress and, rather childishly, of her birthday.

His flowers arrived before he did, a corsage of lavender and yellow orchids and dozens of lavender sweet peas, which had to be set into milk bottles and jelly glasses, because they hadn't a single vase in the house. Then he came, tall, immaculate in a dinner jacket, and Nina had her party. This was the third since that occasion, but she felt nothing could ever eclipse the splendor of the first.

To-night they decided to walk part of the distance up Broadway, at least. The air was clear, and so crisp it seemed almost to crackle around them as they walked through the streets.

"I wonder if you're dressed warmly enough," he said, glancing down at her thin, pointed slippers.

"Please — I'm sure I am. I want to walk. I'm awfully warm, anyway," and she took off her hat.

"I wouldn't do that," he suggested.

"I hate hats."

"That's strange."

"Oh, I really like them," she hastened to explain. "I love to buy them and have them. But I hate to wear them."

He laughed. "Only this morning a woman told me that. When she's nervous or sick, she goes out and buys a twenty-dollar hat, and that cures all ills. But unfortunately, this patient should have come to me sooner. The hat couldn't do the trick."

Nina was swinging her hat jauntily. She stopped to ask a question. "Do women tell you such funny things? What else do they say?"

"What would you tell a doctor?" he returned.

She was slightly piqued at his avoiding the issue. "I've never been to a doctor. I suppose I might try just for the fun of it."

He shook her by the arm as they walked. "Don't you waste any man's time like that!"

The pressure of Penning's fingers about her arm grew tighter. Laughing, Nina glanced at them. He was watching her and caught her gaze, but did not release his hold. They walked a block in silence. His words had a familiar ring, as of a tune heard in childhood, and the girl welcomed the silence that she might identify the phrase. She remembered how — an argument between her mother and father about a girl who came three times a week, for injections the doctor had said, but his wife held another opinion. Nina could even recall the girl distinctly, with

her foulard princess dresses, her sheer, tucked voile shirt-waists worn over pale-colored slips, her dark hair turned in a figure eight at the nape of the neck and ballooned into a pompadour over the forehead.

"Did any girl ever come to you just for fun?" Nina wondered.

"All sorts come to us. You ought to know. You — a doctor's daughter."

"I never was interested in such things when Dad was here. Do they?"

"I give 'em such bad-tasting medicine, they never return."

"But suppose they fool you, and don't take the stuff? I wouldn't."

"Oh, yes, you would. You'd dip the point of your tongue into it for the experience. But you see, I give the first dose right in my office. They've got to take it." He shook her again. "I tell you, don't you dare waste any man's time on anything so foolish. There's enough illness in the world — we're needed for that."

His hand slipped down to the crook in her elbow, and they jogged along in step, arm-in-arm. There was the cadence of harmony in their gait, the rhythm of friendly accord in the swing of their bodies from side to side. The streets lay in that state of relaxation between the dinner and post-theater hours, with just enough people sauntering by to turn to look at them: the hatless girl and the man in evening dress, swinging along as if they were ice-skating. Nina, pursuing her own thoughts, apparently grew irrelevant.

"Was she pretty?"

"Who?"

"The last girl who tried to fool you."

"They're not always girls. What gave you that impression?"

Nina didn't know. She supposed that most patients were of her own sex. She had always heard the women mentioned more frequently.

"Nonsense," he said impatiently. "Women make less fuss about going to doctors. They're not such cowards as men in illness. But so far as the other thing goes — there are plenty of cranks wanting to expose the medical profession. And young reporters looking for good stories, or medical students playing jokes on older men. Few of us are rarely taken in."

"But was she?"

"Don't remember."

"You don't remember the girl, or you don't remember whether she was pretty?"

"Both."

"Heavens — don't you look at people?" said Nina in amazement.

"Yes, but not for their beauty. For the play of emotions, for signs of disease, for obscure motives. I notice if they're too thin or too stout, for medical reasons; if their shoulders are stooped or hips too narrow."

"I don't see how you can help it, though. Do you look at me that way too?"

He did not answer immediately. Nina studied the stars in the interim, confident that he was guiding her. Penning's gaze swept her hair, the cropped curls wind blown into gay filaments. She leaned on his arm more heavily. He remembered clearly how she had stood before him that day after her bath, and there was humor enough in his

soul to force the realization that he certainly did not search her face for signs of anything but the fresh vivacity and wistful mystery of her youth. And perhaps the character of her reaction to his sobriety.

Judson Penning had lived intently and intensely. As head of a field hospital, and before that as volunteer apprentice to his profession, when he might have been practicing independently, he had made greater demands upon himself, and set higher standards for himself than those dictated by the exigencies of the work. During every period of his life, he had pressed from each hour the last flavored drop to be extracted from the fruit of that hour. At work or at leisure, he assimilated the mental, physical or emotional food which best suited his ulterior purpose. Not in spite of his apparent placidity, but because of it, had he achieved this capacity for life. In economizing on the external display of enjoyment, he converted the force thus gained toward a fund of inner satisfaction. Carried farther along the road by his war experience than might normally have been possible for a man of thirty-one, nevertheless Penning saw new vistas of achievement glimmer in the not too distant future. But the road was a lonely one, and imperceptibly the idea took shape that companionship might be highly desirable. He had no fear to tread it alone. Blindfolded he could still trace his steps. He needed no hand to guide him, no encouragement. What he wanted might better have been identified as confirmation, as approval, as Echo, answering him from the hills only when addressed.

Among the women in that stratum of society to which he belonged both by blood and financial right, he knew a number with graceful, mature understanding of the force

that drove him into medicine rather than the inherited business of banking. Nina possessed no such lucid vision. Yet *her* comprehension seemed to be more vital to him. There was something mystic about the way she understood. She seemed to possess power to project herself beyond her own limitations into his, to reach out beyond her own experience into his, when he talked to her of matters with which she could not possibly be familiar.

There was Echo answering from the hills; Echo answering from the high places; Echo repeating that which he wanted to hear. Only Nina had the advantage over her mythological rival in that she was more than a voice. She was flesh and white skin and human warmth.

At Columbus Circle, Nina discovered a half-portion moon, resting on the sky line like a slice of lemon on the chipped rim of a teacup. Penning had never thought of troubling about a moon in the city, but now that Nina had pointed it out, he knew that he would inevitably associate her with its monthly refulgence, and with the memory of this scene in the Circle. They stood within the safety zone, watching the sky. A few taxis rolled out of the park behind them. A vagrant wind sported with some dead flowers lifted from a wreath at the base of the Maine memorial. A Broadway surface car clanged across the Circle, and the conductor, provoked because he thought they wanted to board it, since they stood within the safety zone, shouted some vulgarity at them. Somehow even this could not shatter Penning's reverie. It seemed to him that if Nina should disappear from his life, she might take with her other scenes he wanted to remember. Instantly he thought of a plan. Natural decisiveness aggravated by training inspired the idea. He had been known to operate

after a moment's counsel, with a swiftness which made his subordinates call him rash. Whether or not this decision was as important he did not stop to consider. Certainly it was as hazardous as many other he had acted upon.

Some minutes before, their conversation had ended on a personal note. Judson Penning bridged the gap of silence with the ultimate of personal requests.

He said steadily, "What would you say if I asked you to marry me, Nina?"

He had noticed before that, in a certain aloof mood, she regarded simplest events with naïve wonder, accepting the unusual with strange assurance. Her whole life might have been composed of fairly strange men who abruptly asked her to marry them. And yet, Penning liked her first casual reaction, was pleased that she did not start and draw away, or appear frightened.

"It would be lots of fun to be together like this, wouldn't it?" she returned casually.

All this time he had preserved the contact of his arm against hers. First, he led her out of the vortex of traffic to the gates of the park. Then deliberately he broke the contact, when perhaps there was most need of it, and taking a pipe from his pocket, he lit it, with the care of a man trying to prove to himself the extent of his own control.

"Yes, it would," he said puffing.

"And after your day's work was done, we could take long walks together, and go to concerts."

"More than that, Nina."

"And I could help you, couldn't I? I think that was why Dad didn't get ahead. Mother didn't care. But I'd care. I'd want you to be the most famous surgeon in the whole world. I'd want the whole world to know you.

There would be ways for me to help you, wouldn't there?"

Pipe and smoldering tobacco went back into the pocket. She could not see his eyes. He could not see hers. It was dark there, close to the wall, and they were two people talking with a velvet curtain between them, each sensing the other's presence more sharply because of the separation.

"A thousand ways, Nina."

"And you'd let me help?"

"Yes."

She did not know whether or not she loved him. But he had not spoken of love, either. Perhaps something higher than love was involved. She felt flattered that this self-sufficient, competent man should need her assistance. Flattered, and awed, and swept with the wonder of it. That she, Nina Wyndram, could be of service to Doctor Judson Penning! Her hands reached out, and he brushed aside the drapery of night to find them.

"Let's — " she breathed. "Now, to-night. Right away."

"We couldn't get a license at this hour."

"Oh! We need a license."

"I'll come for you at ten to-morrow morning. Shall I, Nina? That will give me time to call off whatever I have on for the day."

"At ten."

He whisked her into a taxi, and sat opposite her. She was laughing excitedly. His eyes were not empty now. Her reflection filled them. At the door, she wanted him to come in for a moment as usual.

"Not to-night," he said, without knowing why he refused. "Not to-night. The taxi's waiting. Until to-morrow, Nina," and crushing her finger tips in his palm as he would a handful of loose flower petals he kissed them.

Ten minutes later, Julia found her, still in hat and coat, standing bewildered in the center of the room.

"Mother, I'm going to be married to-morrow at ten o'clock."

"To Penning? You're doing pretty well, Nina."

"Don't you think Dad would have liked to know that I'm going to marry a doctor, too?"

Julia spread her coat on the couch. She was pleased that her last investment in clothes for Nina was bringing this dividend.

"And it's going to be wonderful, Mother. I'm to help him, to be a real partner."

Julia kicked off spike-heeled pumps and regarded her daughter in a sarcastic manner, which the girl missed. "Do you want me to go along as your witness?"

"I didn't know we had to have one."

"You can always get one at City Hall. But I'll come if he wants me to. Ten o'clock, did you say? That's early. I'll pack your bag for you."

Always the efficient manager, she changed into a negligee, took down a proper black suitcase and began collecting Nina's possessions, talking as she worked.

"If your father had lived or made some provision for you, you'd have been married in fine style. You'd come to him like a princess, I tell you. This isn't much of a showing. But I guess you won't have to bother about these clothes, not with his money. When you get back from your trip — I suppose you're going away, he doesn't have to worry about a practice — you can send the suitcase back to me."

Nina, like a kitten attracted by moving objects, followed her mother about.

X

They were married next morning in the Municipal Building by a magistrate who called them familiarly "Nina" and "Judson." Nina could hardly suppress her amusement, and glancing at her partner in the escapade, observed his reaction to be a similar one. There was none of the phallic symbolism, no hint of barter and purchase and very little of dignity. Julia had come with them at Judson's especial request, and she was on her best behavior, charming, gracious, sprightly, as she could be with those she liked, or pretended to like.

At the proper moment, the magistrate ordered the bridegroom to kiss the bride. Judson did so, softly, slipped a wondrous wedding ring of platinum and diamonds on her finger, and then for two dollars they got a certificate done in golden scrolls, and they were married.

"Well — Mrs. Penning," said Julia, kissing her daughter warmly.

They laughed.

"Well — Doctor Penning," said Nina. "How did you know the right size?" She was turning the new diamond-paved ring. "And how did you get it so quickly?"

"This morning — I guessed at it. You know I remembered the size of your fingers by the touch of them."

"I think it's wonderfully clever of you!" admired Nina.

"It's not the first clever thing I did since we had dinner together last night," he agreed.

Nina looked up brightly, flushed, then lowered her eyes.

"I'm vastly pleased with myself, aren't I?" he teased.

"And with me?"

"Naturally."

Julia was studying them, and making no secret of her curiosity. It was not that she considered Nina a drug on the market. She had hoped for the girl's early marriage as a means to her own complete liberation. She herself could not have made a better choice for her daughter. Penning had money, social position, professional standing in an honorable calling. Despite Julia's oft-expressed contempt of the personal conduct of medical men, she was nevertheless pleased that she would be able to announce to her late husband's people that Nina had not married below her own level. Nina was probably dazzled by the man. Julia could see why the glisten of her should attract him. What she did not understand was the nature of his rapid decision.

Julia had met Penning only twice before, and each time he had left an impression of composure pushed to the point of apathy. But he understood mother perhaps better than daughter and, recognizing her curiosity, responded in characteristic fashion. He drained his eyes of emotion, shut the floodgates that there might be no back flow, and regarded her in turn, formal though not hostile. She was his wife's mother, after all, and it was normal for her to want to probe his reserve.

When they reached the street he said to her, "Will you come with us? Mrs. Kent, my housekeeper, is preparing a lunch. She was up before dawn doing it, I imagine. I thought since Nina and I had met so much in hotels, we'd enjoy the privacy of this day."

Julia pressed a tight ball of something into Nina's hand. "Thanks," she said. "But I think I'll leave you. Of course, I'd like to see my daughter's new home — "

"At any time," Penning added. The battle of appraisal was resumed between them. "Nina will have plenty of leisure to entertain, especially her mother."

He put Julia into a taxi. While waiting for him on the Municipal Building steps, Nina unrolled the tight ball into a fifty-dollar bill. She was astonished and waved it at Penning when he came back.

"Look, Jude," she had decided the night before to call him that. "Look what Mother gave me."

"That's a lot of money for a little girl," he remarked aloud. He thought, "The purchase price of freedom."

"I never had so much to spend before."

"What are you going to buy with it?"

"It's a surprise."

"Don't you go buying anything for me!"

"Why not?" she challenged.

"I'm sure I've got everything a man can possibly need."

"There must be some tiny little thing you've overlooked."

"I suppose your woman's eye will find the missing piece."

Without quite detecting the possessive inflection of his voice, or knowing that it was possessive, Nina liked this new way he had of talking to her. She felt dignified and responsible at being told she had "a woman's eye" for setting things right.

It was cold where they stood. They drifted down the street, apparently not knowing whither they were bound.

"Jude, do I imagine it? Or did we come here in a dark green car, with nice soft gray cushions?"

"Yes, my dear, we did. Cousin Amelia Penning's car, borrowed for the occasion. I've never really needed one. There's Peters now, coming toward us."

"Congratulations, Doctor, and you, ma'am," said the husky fellow in green livery. "I got orders from Miss Penning, Doctor, to deliver this box to the bride."

This was the first indication Nina had of the possibility of a family behind Judson. True, he spoke affectionately of a mother and sister in New Orleans, but New Orleans was far away, and she had conceived of him in New York as a shooting star, without specified orbit or companions in space.

Once they were settled for the trip uptown, Nina opened the package. A card inside read, "To Judson's Wife," in the largest handwriting Nina had ever seen. She lifted out a bouquet of white sweet peas, frilled in the manner of a former generation, but instead of paper lace, it was set off by real lace, stiffened in some artificial way. Orange blossoms hung by ribbons around the edge, like ornaments from a chandelier. It was so quaint, so pretty, the attention so delicate and thoughtful — Her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Jude — isn't this sweet?"

Reassuringly he rested his hand on her knee. She had her legs crossed, and at his touch, righted her position, almost as if she shrank away. He could not be sure, of course. She had never shown any signs of skittish fear of him. Perhaps the abruptness of his movement had startled her. He was a man, and thirty-one, and had benefited by experience of a variety not open to every man. He drew

his hand away, slowly and casually, so the difference would not be too sharp.

"It's because I'm happy," she told him naïvely.

"You'll like Cousin Amelia. She's sixty-five, and unmarried. And gets twice as much fun out of life as a woman half her age. Only, don't be shocked at her clothes. She wears the funniest — well — you'll see yourself."

They were driving through Central Park now, from east to west, along a macadam road which Nina knew very well. Often she had traveled the route with her father, and she told Judson how she used to wait in the little runabout while the doctor went upstairs to pay his call. When she was very much younger, she had gone walking with Mary on the footpaths that kept pace with the sweeping road. Nurse-maids were out now, too, and their charges were skating, playing ball and quarreling as of old, or sleeping blissfully under fur robes in high-wheeled baby coaches. So Nina and Judson fell to exchanging stories, and all too soon the ride ended.

The neighborhood in which Judson lived was not what it used to be. No district in New York ever is. Either startling improvements are under way whereby rentals may be tripled, or Time's corrosion has necessitated a lowering of the general standard of tenancy. Judson's house was still very valuable property, and the location desirable. Since he did not care about his neighbors, it mattered little that the house on his right, once the home of an international financier, had now been converted into expensive studio apartments, nor that the one to the left was sold to and occupied by a man who had made a fortune supplying brass uniform buttons to the Allied armies.

Nina knew Judson made his home and had his offices on

Riverside Drive, just a short distance above its inception at the smooth, broad Seventy-second Street curve, but the fact did not come home to her until she stood before the brick and granite structure. Nina seemed fated to spend her life in the neighborhood in which she was born, like a creature in woodland preserve, free within its limitations. She had sampled two types of dwellings before this, her third stage of transmigration.

She clutched Judson's arm. "I know this house!"

"Do you? Ever been in it?"

"Jude — you weren't in it six or eight years ago? Or when I was a little girl. Were you?"

"No. But Cousin Amelia was. I took it over from her right after the Armistice, when I got back."

"I don't mean I knew who lived in it. I know the outside of the house. You see, Mary used to put on a nursemaid's uniform in the afternoon, and when we tired of the park we came over here. Why — I was the champion hoop-roller of the Drive. And ball-bouncer. I did a thousand once without missing, and Dad scolded Mary for not stopping me. And do you remember that game — diabolo? There's a house right along here, at Seventy-sixth Street — we'll have to go up to see it, Jude — four stories high. I was a little thing, but I could throw my diabolo 'way up to the roof. I know you're laughing at me, but I'm so terribly excited, Jude — "

The grilled glass door was opened from the inside, and Nina stepped into her new home. But instead of Mrs. Kent, Cousin Amelia swept out on them, shaking Judson's hand vigorously, and enveloping Nina in a crushing, octopus sort of embrace.

"You'll have to put a couple of encyclopedias on the

chair for the little bride," she said in a deep mannish voice, "if you want her to eat off that huge table."

"I'm not so small," Nina laughed. "I'm over five feet two."

"Well — all of that?" rumbled Cousin Amelia.

"Will you stay?" Judson asked.

Amelia Penning was taller than her favorite cousin, and in sixty-five years her figure had certainly run astray. Over its uncorseted lumps, she wore a bungalow apron. True, it was made of fine, rich black satin, but it was, after all, only a bungalow apron. There was not even a bit of embroidery to relieve the simplicity. Just a black satin bungalow apron, leather sandals, gray hair drawn back tightly from a heavy-jowled face — that was Cousin Amelia. And yet she radiated a certain gusty heartiness and a sly humor. She might have chosen this style of dress out of humorous spite.

"Not for a minute," she returned. "I found something I want to give to Nina. I'd have sent it along with Peters, only I hadn't unearthed it until after he left. Every wife ought to have a club to wield against her husband, my dear," she said laughingly to Nina. "Something with which she can taunt him. Here's your club. I'm quite sure it's the only one in existence."

She handed the girl an old photograph of Judson, taken when he was four. Every family has such pictures hidden away, but Nina had never seen one like it. The boy Judson wore kilts, ruffled kilts, and the collar on his blouse was edged with ruffles. He sat on a long marble bench, legs spread, one hand stiffly clutching each knee, the ruffled skirts undulating in billowy folds about him. The photographer had probably frightened the child, because his

mouth was wide open and he stared straight ahead with glassy eyes.

Penning looked over Nina's shoulder, then burst into uproar. "Where did you get that? Romance is dead, Cousin Amelia — killed in infancy. Where did you get it?"

Nina regarded their amusement uncomprehendingly. "What a cute baby you were, Jude! Thank you, Miss Penning. I wouldn't exchange this picture — "

They went off again into a fit of laughter. Cousin Amelia jammed on her hat, of some metallic cloth which looked like an old salmon can.

"If you feel that way a year from to-day, Nina dear, then all's going to be well. I'm leaving, children. Do go inside. The girls spent a year's salary on flowers for the office. And though they don't want to intrude, I imagine they're hoping for a glimpse of you. I'll leave Peters here."

Details and outlines were blurred after that. Nina had no clear idea of the interior of the house, except that the rooms were high-ceilinged and long, and the furnishings in rare taste, though formal. The suite on the ground floor given over to Judson's professional work had character of its own, but familiarity with the nuances was to come to Nina only after she had roamed about alone. Just then, when the girls showered them with confetti and rice, she felt that if she loosened her hold on Judson's arm, if she strayed one step off, she might be lost in the labyrinth. The nervous tension almost blinded her.

The three girls, the nurse, the secretary, the X-ray and laboratory technician, all talked at once, laughed gayly, squeezed Nina's hand, spoke to Judson in a short, disjointed, almost incoherent jargon, such as is used by people who know each other intimately.

The girls were afraid he might not discover the display on the desk in the consultation room, but nothing escaped him. Nina was enchanted with the bride and groom made of full-sized clothespins dressed in paper, the flower girls of tiny clothespins, the toy piano. At the instrument sat a papier-mâché skeleton of the variety common at Hallowe'en, and on the music rack a miniature piece of music, titled by hand "Heart, Liver, Lungs, Spleen."

"That," said the nurse, trying not to appear self-conscious, "is the organ recital."

Nina thought her clever. Judson, knowing his staff, suspected that they had improvised the whole affair just for the opportunity of springing the line. He, on his part, was enjoying the whole affair more than any fashionable wedding he had ever attended, and not merely because it was his own, he kept assuring himself. The three girls in white followed the pair to the foot of the steps. In one hand Nina held the photograph and the skeleton, in the other Cousin Amelia's posy. When she reached a point halfway up, she turned to wave, and on a sudden impulse, flung the flowers into the group. The nurse was married and stepped aside. But the others scrambled for the nosegay, and Nina caught a last view, at the turn, of the two white figures tugging merrily at the ribbons.

"They'll love you for that," whispered Judson.

"I was frightened after I did it. Do you think Cousin Amelia will care?"

"She'll be delighted. Little things like that please her beyond words."

Upstairs, Mrs. Kent, in hissing brown taffeta, welcomed the new mistress. She was a squat little woman, a brown earthenware jug of a woman, who added the necessary

homely touch to the establishment, and who knew her place, for all the power she wielded in the doctor's home. She took Nina's wraps and showed her into a charming little dressing room of green and gold, where she might wash and comb her hair. Judson waited for her at the door of the dining room, and catching her unawares, kissed her. To his utter surprise, she wound her arms around his neck and lifted her face. He kissed her again and again and again, holding her to him, and she submitted blindly. Mrs. Kent had belled herself with a taffeta dress. They heard her coming now, and abruptly they drew apart, stepping into the dining room.

Throughout luncheon, Nina had that same feeling that this could not possibly be her home. Perhaps it was only one of those show places to which the public is admitted on certain days, for a fee which goes to charity. Judson seemed so far away at the other end of the table. And she wanted him closer. Her eyes seemed to grow larger and larger, and the pressure in her head made her feel feverish. The little boy in the photograph, which she kept propped up against the silver flower bowl in the center of the table, alternately swelled and diminished in size. Sitting under the water goblet, the skeleton seemed to move of its own volition.

"They say it's good luck to have one of them at a wedding feast," said Mrs. Kent.

That reminded Nina of Mary, who always knew just what was and what was not a good omen, though professing herself to believe none of it. In desultory fashion she talked of Mary, but she and Judson only fenced at conversation, communicating with each other by shrugs and smiles and tilted heads rather than words.

Mrs. Kent effaced herself as much as possible, talking only when there was a decided and protracted lull. No doubt she felt a slight responsibility for, and pride in, her doctor. Certainly she behaved as if she had to exploit his table talents, lest the new bride think she had married a dull man. In one of these pauses she told the doctor that the girls had gone home.

He nodded approval. "I wanted them to have a holiday."

"And I promised them some of the cake, Doctor. I thought you'd like them to have it."

"Are we having a cake?" cried Nina.

Mrs. Kent appeared offended at the mere suspicion of a wedding without a cake. "Oh, yes. It's not a real wedding cake. There wasn't time. But just something to celebrate. I'll bring it in now, Mrs. Penning."

When she had gone, Nina said, "Every time Mrs. Kent calls me Mrs. Penning, I think she's talking to somebody else."

Judson laughed. "You'll grow used to it. You'd better!" he teased.

The cake was white inside and out, with tiny marzipan flowers arranged to form the initial "W" and "P." It melted in the mouth like fresh fallen snow, and despite the heartiness of the meal just consumed, they ate generous portions, much to Mrs. Kent's satisfaction.

"I'd love to have a piece for Mother," said Nina, "if it will last."

"This keeps fresh for a week," the housekeeper assured her proudly.

"By all means," urged Judson. "You can take it over to-morrow, or send it."

"To-morrow?" echoed Nina.

Mrs. Kent rustled out. Judson modified his statement. "To-morrow, or the next day. Any time you want to, Nina."

"Jude, aren't we going away?"

"Where?"

"Why — away. On a trip. On a — "

"Honeymoon? Good Lord — no."

"You're just joking," she pouted.

"No, child, I mean it."

"But, Jude, my bag's all packed. Mother said — " she caught herself.

"Yes — what did Mother say?"

"She said —you were rich enough not to care about lost time. She meant that it wouldn't matter to you if you went away." Suddenly Julia's attitude seemed cheap to Nina. She wanted to hide, to make apologies. "Jude, how do you suppose Mother knew about you?"

"She looked me up, of course."

Panic glistened in her eyes. "I didn't know. I didn't care. Oh, Jude, you know I didn't care if you were rich or poor."

He crossed the room to her, crushing her finger tips in his strong palm as he had done before, and fondling them.

"Of course you didn't, Nina. You're such a baby. Every mother wants to know the circumstances of her possible sons-in-law. Some use one method, some another. But I'm sorry you're disappointed about the trip."

"I am. I thought we'd have such fun together, somewhere."

"We will. Don't you remember our plans?"

"Couldn't you manage — just a few days?"

"Not even one, child. Believe me, any business man could turn his business over to an assistant, but a doctor — "

"Suppose you were sick?"

"Then I'd have to stop. But I'm not sick, Nina, and mustn't break faith. There's a responsibility, not only to one's own patients but to the public. So long as I maintain a practice, I can't go off on a pleasure trip. Not yet. I'm only beginning. Look, we have a whole day to ourselves in New York. That's a novelty for me. Let's make the most of it. To-morrow we work. Where would you like to go?"

"To-morrow, you'll have twice as much work then. On account of to-day."

"That's nothing."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Jude. I didn't mean to turn everything upside down."

"That's my good little lamb," he said, slipping his arm around her waist.

"Why do you call me that? Mother used to."

He pulled her hair. "Because of the golden fleece."

She pretended he had hurt her. He pulled it harder. Harmony was restored, and manlike, Judson was pleased with what he thought to be her ready understanding of the situation. Nina could hardly believe it was only one o'clock. She wanted to visit both cathedrals, St. Patrick's and St. John's. He voted for music after dinner.

"Symphonic music," Nina added. "And dinner at my birthday restaurant."

"Whatever you say. Now I suppose you want to see the rest of the house."

"And watch the river from the balcony."

XI

The house was a nest of Chinese boxes. Each room opened into another, in endless, dizzying array. Actually, Nina wanted only to get a glimpse of the Hudson, but she hesitated to say so, for fear of seeming disinterested. The granite balcony which she had noted so often from the outside of the house could be reached only through the sleeping quarters. And yet it was not until Judson said, "This is our bedroom, Nina," that she regarded the step she had taken with any degree of clarity. Then she became poignantly conscious of a hooked rug, of a gay patchwork quilt, of the restful simplicity of the furniture.

"All this comes from our plantation house," he went on. "You can make whatever changes you like."

Somehow she had not thought much of the nights. Of sleeping. Furtively she glanced about. An odd sofa occupied one wall. Surely they didn't expect her to sleep on that! No, of course not. There was a bed, a four-poster. Reticence, foreign to her until that moment, halted her. She felt ashamed to be in the room with Jude, and she passed the bed with eyes averted.

The Hudson displayed several warships in their honor. In one cathedral they heard mass; in the other they watched two chubby-faced altar boys rehearse their duties. The Italian restaurant, on second sight, suffered not a whit. The concert proved enchanting. Upon their return home, Jude established her in a high-backed armchair,

covered her knees with a steamer rug, and played on the piano snatches of the Schumann A Minor Concerto and the Beethoven Fourth, both of which she had heard for the first time that night.

Nina's eyelids drooped. The day had been the fullest in her life, and she was tired. Sleepy. Ought she make the first move to go upstairs? Would he think he was boring her? And she wasn't sure she wanted to sleep yet, either. Perhaps the waking hours had not made their last offering, echoed their last melody. It was restful to be alone with him, to have him welcome her with the music they had just heard, as if their life was to be but a continuation of those disembodied harmonies.

But Jude, he who did well that which interested him, was conscious of his own inaccuracy. He had wanted to play his best for her, perhaps to parade a bit before her, for one night at least, as a romantic lover, instead of a busy, prosaic doctor. He could not bring to the performance his usual powers of consecration. He recognized one cardinal sin, a division of interest, and now he found himself guilty of it. He swung around.

"You're tired, Nina."

She smiled drowsily. He unwrapped the rug and fairly lifted her from a chair with a sort of impersonal tenderness for which many a patient waited through the day.

"Go upstairs, Nina. Don't argue. All children hate to go to sleep. I always take a last look at the office — to be sure the drugs are locked up and so forth."

She leaned against him heavily. "I won't find my way," she murmured.

"Poor lost lamb. I'll take you up."

When they got into the automatic elevator, however,

she brightened, and wanted to work the buttons herself. "They'll wonder what happened to me at the lab," she said irrelevantly. "I forgot to 'phone."

"I told Slater this morning."

"You think of everything, Jude."

"I try to," he admitted, not without pride.

Quite abruptly, at sight of his receding figure, she grew panicky. She slammed the door, flinging herself against it like one eluding pursuers. Everything was the same, the bed, the satin patchwork quilt turned back, the old cedar chest, the six-legged sofa. Who ever heard of a six-legged sofa? Jude said his great-great grandfather had made it himself. What an odd thing to make — a six-legged sofa.

Feverishly she began to look for her bag. Under the highboy, under the bed, in the dressing alcove. She had to have a kimono, slippers, a nightgown. Jude would be back any minute. There! he was coming. No, he wasn't either. She had to have that bag. The blood sang in her ears. She thought of the closet, and wrenching open the door, saw that Mrs. Kent had unpacked her few possesions. The lavendar sprigged dress rubbed shoulders familiarly with a gray suit of Jude's. The purple kimono hung flat against the wall beside a purple — how queer that they should match — purple lounging robe. Everything in its proper place, in *his* closet, with *his* clothes. She revolted. She didn't want her things so close to his. Not yet. She snatched the kimono from its hook, and her white, plain silk nightgown came with it. Her hand grazed his robe — how queer that they should match; why? — and she drew sharply away.

She would have to look for her slippers in the shoe

pockets along the wall. The closet was large, almost as large as that old room of hers, and as she stepped into it she had a sense of walking down a long, endless passageway. Fear clutched at her throat. She might be lost. And Jude would never know what happened to her. What was that old poem? About the bride who hid from the wedding party and long years after they found her skeleton in a chest? Good luck to have a skeleton at a wedding but not the bride's! She wasn't going to hide. She wasn't going to be caught in a closet and die before the marriage night, the sacred night everybody said it was. Sacred? She wouldn't stop to look for slippers. Suppose the door snapped shut?

Her heart pounding, she emerged and sat down in a low rocker. Now she remembered it was a cedar chest the bride had hidden in. The rocker had a history, she forgot what. Nina hung her dress on a modern costumer in the alcove. Well — her family had a history too. The Pennings needn't think Jude had married beneath him. Dad could have belonged to the Sons of the Revolution, if he'd put any stock in such things. Then she would be a Daughter of the Revolution, or Colonial Dame, or something or other. Oh — she had ancestors!

Jude!

For the first time in her life, Nina felt acutely aware of herself. Her body seemed to burn into itself. She slipped on the gown, hurried into her kimono and under shelter of these garments undressed, with jerky movements, as they used to do in camp when it was too cold to be uncovered for a moment. No — not Jude. Not yet. Nina drew a deep sigh. Not yet. The clothes went up on the costumer. She arranged her shoes under the highboy, out

of sight. You'll grow used to being called Mrs. Penning.

Married at eighteen. When was Mother married? And queens? Queen Victoria? Eighteen. Even Queen Victoria had a marriage night. Or should her shoes go under the bed? She'd rather not be a queen. They said ministers had to be in the room when royal babies were born. In the notes at the back of the book, the Shakespeare authority said Juliet was fourteen. Fourteen and ready for marriage. Can you imagine me being married at fourteen, in gymnasium bloomers and a middy blouse? And all the guests marching to the tune of "Under the Double Eagle?" Column right!

She had no idea what to do with her stockings. She thought Jude would not care to have them on the back of the chair as was her custom. And this was his bedroom. No — this is our bedroom, Nina. You can make whatever changes you like. — The bedposts looked inviting but then one didn't hang stockings on a bed. — It came from the plantation house too.

The rules in the catechism told you what to do and say and think before confirmation. There ought to be a catechism to tell you what to do with your stockings. Mother should have whispered it to her before they separated. She tried them all over; here, there, everywhere. She stood in the center of the room, dangling them between thumb and forefinger. She might hang them up for Christmas. There wasn't any fireplace. The stockings — stockings —

The elevator door clicked. Hysterically, she threw the stockings to the floor. One toe looked like a serpent's head and she ground it under her bare heel.

Without knocking, Jude walked in. Light of step. As if

he had been gone only a minute instead of a year. She dared not look up, but stood stiffly facing him. She did not know what his thoughts were, yet they seemed to ripple through her veins like a new infusion, a transfusion.

"All locked up," he said casually, very casually. "Well — you did that quickly. Thank heaven, you've got that lovely kimono on." He ran his hand gently over the embroidery at her throat. "It's the one you wore that day when you kept me waiting. I was afraid you'd think you had to get a new one."

Jude removed his collar, leaving the tie strung through it, and hung it over the back of the rocker, where it swung like a wreath decorated with ribbon streamers. He had a fine neck, not thick like some men's. Nina saw that from the corner of her eye.

He continued to talk in that easy, conversational tone, of this and that. "I don't remember anything else you ever wore. Not definitely. Except that you always looked lovely. But that kimono. And I was angry at you, to say the least. You impudent little thing."

He was coming toward her again. She was conscious of the bed behind her, the white bed, the long white bed like a coffin. They would lay her in it soon, to sleep. No, she would have to step into it herself. Not a coffin! Not a coffin! She was not going to die. She was going to live. Going to be born. Perhaps she'd never been born at all. Perhaps Jude was to create her that night. A sob caught in her throat.

Then the telephone rang. Nina did not know there was a telephone in the room. She started, stifling a cry. Jude caught her by the arm.

"Did that frighten you, dear?"

Still she had not found her voice. Jude was talking. His words stabbed the air.

"Hello — right here. Is it? Are you sure? Of course. Half an hour. Yes — might have to walk."

A premonition of danger paralyzed Nina. She stood rooted to the spot, suspended, a great void in her brain where a moment ago thoughts had trod upon each other.

"I'm sorry, Nina. God — I'm sorry."

"Sorry?" she repeated, with a catch in her breath.

Jude was putting on his collar again, and looking at her, not in the mirror. Something had happened to his eyes. Something terrible. Not that they grew hard or cold, but distant. He looked at her, yet beyond her, fixedly, at something over her head, yet within his own imagination.

"I'm called to the hospital, Nina."

The room reeled. "Now, Jude? Now?"

"I'm sorry, Nina. My God, I'm sorry. I can't help it. I'm called. They've been trying to locate me since four o'clock. They said Mrs. Kent took a message. I didn't see it anywhere downstairs."

A sense of defeat goaded her on. She forgot her embarrassment, forgot her self-consciousness, and ran to him, hanging to his arm with desperate persistency.

"Not now, Jude. Not to-night. Oh, Jude, you can't go now. What am I to do all alone in the house? In a strange house."

He did not even caress her. Always he gazed at that distant point. "Mrs. Kent is somewhere downstairs, in the basement. I can't help it, Nina love."

"And what am I to do?"

"Go to bed. Get some rest."

She rubbed her cheek against his sleeve. "Don't I count at all?" she implored.

"It's because you count so much. It's because you're part of me. You'll understand. You'll sacrifice what I'm willing to sacrifice."

"Dad used to say specialists had no night calls. How funny!" She began to laugh, and laugh, and laugh.

Jude shook her violently. "Stop that, Nina. Stop it!" he shouted. And she stopped, frightened at his voice.

"The woman's one of my private patients. It's appendicitis. Her family doctor advised operation. I thought we could freeze it. But I promised her faithfully — "

" — faithfully — " Nina repeated in a daze.

" — that I'd do the operation if her condition changed. I promised I'd come whenever they called. The house doctor doesn't think she'll last until morning. If the appendix bursts — "

What happens when your head bursts?

"Try to get some sleep, Lamb. Please."

"I don't count," she kept on saying. "I don't count. Only your honor, your responsibility."

He misunderstood. "Your health does."

Even when he was at the door she thought she could recall him. If only she knew the right word, the potent prayer, the subtle incantation.

"Jude — "

And he was gone.

She flung herself across the bed and broke into tears. She was cheated, wounded, thwarted.

BOOK TWO

GESTATION

XII

A DEAL of Julia's watchful cunning lurked in Nina, appearing however, as sensitivity rather than shrewdness. She had noted immediately the difference in atmosphere of the suite on the first floor which Jude used for professional purposes. Within a few days she made another observation — that Jude himself was more genial while downstairs, his step lighter, his voice more soothing in its modulations.

The chintz and wicker of the reception room alone seemed enough to establish this mood. The X-ray room and laboratory reflected a certain animation not entirely due to friendly crowding of apparatus. And even the operating room, also used for examinations, was partially relieved of its austerity by a checkered molding of blue and yellow tiles, finishing off the white.

Sometimes, in passing through the common entrance hall, she heard him greeting his patients with an unforced cheerfulness that caught at her throat. Again, at the opening of a door, hearty laughter might float out to her, or snatches of talk, Jude's unhurried voice rising in contrast to his usual briefness of speech.

Once, in the course of a busy afternoon for him, Nina met Jude in the hall. For a moment he stared unrecognizing, his eyes alert and keen, but temporarily blinded to the interest she represented. Nina, enjoying the joke (they

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She laid her cheek against his. "Terribly, Jude."

"Then suppose I give an exhibition now?"

The canary, long since asleep under its black hood, awoke, answering Jude with a sort of long, quick succession of notes merging finally into an imitation of a peanut roaster. For an interval after bird and man had ceased, Nina sat quietly thinking. Silence wreathed around them like incense, inducing subtle sensations, stirring vague desires.

"Jude?"

"Hm-m — "

"You're not dozing?"

"No."

"What are we going to do to-night?"

"I have two articles to read."

"What about?"

"Hobby."

"Music?"

"Blood transfusions."

She smiled secretly, glorying in his consistency, in his being Jude, always Jude, always himself. Without reason, it made him more hers, to have him consistent.

"When Mary had a day off, she used to go to her niece's and do the heavy cleaning for her," she mused aloud.

"I can understand it."

Nina rambled on while Jude rubbed the back of her hand against his cheek. "I wish I could find Mary. I'd love to have her here. Do you think Mrs. Kent would object?"

"Unquestionably."

"We wouldn't have to get a special cleaning woman

for your office, or a laundress, or a window cleaner. Mary would do it all. And it would be cheaper."

"*Hausfrau,*" teased Jude. He was lying curled up like a great crescent, and drew her up beside him now, to sit in the curve made by his body.

She leaned back against him. "Oh, you talk German, Jude?"

"A. E. F. German."

"Still, it *would* be cheaper," she insisted.

"What's the sudden concern over money?"

She laughed whimsically. "I don't know. I never used to bother about it. There's a lot I think of now that never existed for me before."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh — I see things, and feel things I never knew existed."

"I should hope so, Nina."

"Does everybody feel that way — afterwards? Do you?"

"Some people go through marriage with blinkers on. But it's a four-dimensional universe — length, breadth, depth, and emotion, and there's no proper orientation if you miss one dimension. I think you'll see it all, Nina."

"I haven't yet. Not all. I imagine, now, it's like being up in an aeroplane. I can pick out familiar spots, only they're all changed. And the new sights are a little vague. I'm too high up, or maybe the plane is tipped. I'm just able to get enough of a view to know there are spots I've missed before. I saw a sailor from one of the battleships walking up and down the street here this morning, with a girl. I think — no — I'm sure I looked at them differ-

ently. I remember talk between my parents that means more to me now."

"Like a third eye," said the doctor.

"Oh, Jude — it's wonderful to be able to tell you all this, and have you understand."

More than ever, Nina was determined to bring that verve, that overtone of satisfaction in his working hours, up into their own apartment.

XIII

As a rule, Judson saw no patients in his office before two o'clock. However, his day began at six in the morning, regardless of the number of hours of sleep he had wedged in. Several times a week, setting out at six-thirty, he cantered for an hour through Central Park, on a big black horse which he boarded in a neighborhood stable. Intervening days, he spent the allotted sixty minutes in walking on the river front. He did most of his thinking and planning during this daily round of exercise.

In the beginning, Nina had tumbled out of bed at the same early hour, bathing and dressing according to his pace, and following him around like a page boy. He did not think her earnestness would last very long, but he had the groom bring around a hired horse for her, and saw that she got a pair of proper shoes for walking. She, on her part, considered herself particularly fortunate in having so many concrete ways to prove her faith, and she gloated over the fact constantly, as if he granted some great favor by permitting her to arise at six o'clock.

But when he noted how she groped around sleepily, how she lagged behind one day when they tramped through the snow, how she almost dozed off at breakfast, he started a little subtle propaganda. Once, coming home for lunch and finding her fast asleep in bed, tired by the exertion, he persuaded her to relinquish the plan.

Persuasion was not easy but he managed it, because in the end she could not hold out against him.

Jude was relieved. In no active way had Nina interfered with the hours of sanctuary so necessary to his progress. She was silent when he was silent, and talked only when his remarks warranted an answer. If he spoke rhetorically, she listened wide-eyed, occasionally putting the very question which enabled him to continue in the same strain. Yet her mere presence was a disturbance, a source of physical confusion, presenting an interest foreign and slightly inimical to the day's ordered pursuits. He felt concern for her safety too, when she accompanied him. Her horse might stumble or she might take cold in the December mist from the river, and the responsibility distracted him.

Jude never read at breakfast, either before he married or after Nina ceased to come downstairs. Without making a rite of eating, he derived from it some of the gratification of the epicure. As in any pursuit, at any given point in his life, he distilled out of his meals the last drop of recompense for the expenditure of time.

After breakfast, downstairs in his own suite, he spent a half hour with pipe and medical journal. He had an excellent memory, an absorbent brain, a selective consciousness which emphasized facts related to his work, storing away the apparent unrelated for future reference.

At nine, Judson Penning signed in at the hospital. Occasionally, en route in the subway, he substituted a newspaper for the professional magazine, but he was willing to admit that he had no interest in the world's daily antics. All the headline chatter about the war, and peace without victory and the rights of small nations, by people who

could have no prospective for two decades at least, bored him to anger. He had the attitude of most men upon their return — one of stubborn silence about the whole affair. He did not even show Nina his war pictures until she begged for them. Now she had a snapshot of him in major's uniform framed on her dresser, and he hated the sight of it.

Twice a week, from eleven to one, Jude held clinic. Twice he lectured on anatomy to second-year medical students. The remainder of the week, including Sunday, he reserved for such hospital operations as could be arranged in advance.

Despite the occurrence on the first night of their marriage, Nina did not perceive immediately that she must fit herself into this schedule, that it could not possibly be altered to fit her. True, changes were made, but always to the effect that Jude had more work, not less. Some men could not come until after business hours. That meant six or seven o'clock appointments. Every Wednesday evening he ran a clinic for a downtown settlement, and all this, coupled with his personal practice, on the increase week by week, left little time for the amenities of ordinary existence.

"If the money doesn't mean anything to you," Nina argued, "why can't you refuse some of the cases that come in?"

"I'm just beginning," he explained.

"But you've been back a year."

"What's a year? I wouldn't have been this far, except for the war. I did what I'd never have been able to touch for years to come, the sort of surgery a man may have a chance to get at once in a lifetime. Twenty-four hours a

day of it — don't forget, the most extreme cases. That gave me a fine start in reputation, beside experience."

"Then why do you have to take everything, anyway?"

"I've got to build up a structure. The most simple case may develop into a startling opportunity. A patient isn't a lost factor when he's discharged. He'll bob up again at the queerest moment, or some member of his family, or a friend."

"Do you care about recommendations?" Nina insisted.

"Financially — no. But professionally — yes. I'm damn lucky in not having to worry about money. A fellow with a family to support couldn't take these clinics. What do they pay? Carfare and shoe leather — maybe. A third of what a general practitioner can make on an ordinary afternoon's call."

"Well — they're lucky to get you, too," she reminded him.

"Oh — if not me, they'd find another. I was lucky to be in New York at the time."

Though never given to display of enthusiasm, Jude still entertained a secret boyish wonder at the coincidences attendant upon his affiliation with the Victory Hospital.

In the hysteria of relief after the Armistice, a group of citizens launched a hospital for a neighborhood in need of such an institution. The week the hospital opened its doors, Jude arrived in New York, among the first to return from France. Through Doctor Philip Drake, whose assistant he had been before the War, and by virtue of his record in France, he secured the position of attending surgeon, not yet filled because of the absence of so many competent men. Except for his early discharge, Jude felt he would never have had the appointment. Within a month, half a dozen

older, more experienced men reappeared upon the medical horizon, but Jude by that time was settled at Victory Hospital.

In one sense, Nina was right in her contention that the hospital was fortunate to get him. The position demanded a person of standing and skill, a perpetual worker, a man willing to grow with the institution for a small salary. In addition, Jude contributed a talent for organization. He derived greater satisfaction from creating his own environment than from stepping into one of the old established hospitals.

Brought up in an atmosphere where the grind exacted by the profession was always attributed to the necessity of earning a livelihood, and unmoved herself by any inner, driving force, Nina found Jude's attitude confusing. But when he talked to her in the privacy of their own room, while he passed back and forth from the adjoining bath, or while she lay in bed watching him undress, Nina could for the instant transcend her own limitations. His arguments did not actually dispel her misgivings. What happened was a momentary dissociation of herself from that confusion. It was as if she apprehended the vaulted size of the heavens by the curved flash of a shooting star.

Under the spell of fleshly proximity, under the bond of physical harmony, she sensed in the flash of his words and by the streaking brilliance of his sincerity, a vastness of human purpose beyond her conscious perception. Glimpsing it, she was grateful for being even an infinitesimal speck in the expanse, and was willing to cling to her position without doubting its importance.

The realization of how completely her husband had chained himself to his career came to Nina imperceptibly,

like Arctic daylight, six months dawning. The first month of marriage trailed so much of this incandescence across the heaven of their universe, that Nina beguiled the hours between flashes, not in analysis, but in anticipation of the next dart or memory of the last. And even if Jude did not whistle, or Nina pour his coffee at breakfast, she still considered herself an integral element of his scheme.

Indeed, she considered it no problem at all to conform to his schedule. The whole affair resolved itself into this — if she were sure to be at home during his free time, they could spend it together. When he really had a little leisure, when there was no medical meeting, no patient at the hospital to be visited at night, no extract to be read, no tissue to be studied under the microscope, he fell in with her plans readily.

"To-night I'm yours," was his formula on such occasions, and whether she chose to go out or have him play to her, he kept his promise, with that unspoken proviso between them that, should he get an emergency call, the treaty was abrogated. Despite his readiness, they could not always arrive at theater or concert on time, but from their late entrances, too, Nina extracted a vicarious pleasure. Often she said to an imaginary audience of young matrons *not* married to physicians, "After all, I can't expect The Doctor to neglect his work for some trivial play. You know what it means to be immersed in a career. He's so frightfully busy. It's a miracle he found time to come at all to-night."

She liked the important ring to those words: "It's a miracle he found time at all to-night!" She basked in the reflection of their significance. By repeating them, she experienced some of the contentment she would have de-

rived from the actual performance of Jude's duties. He drank the wine. She became exhilarated.

When Nina was eight years old, she had played with a little girl next door. That was before the street on which they lived had bartered its children for dogs. This child, Karine by name, slim, dark, pensive, exercised a peculiar attraction for Nina, principally because she wore colored slippers and stockings to match her dresses. It was rumored at the grocer's and butcher's and druggist's, whence Mary carried the news, that Karine "went on the stage", in proof whereof the neighborhood cited the child's pink and blue and red footgear.

At any rate, Karine lived by rules of some sort, certain hours for lessons, certain for something she called practicing, certain for play. She always had "a lot to do", her youthful mother kept reminding her, and Nina, not to be outdone by the other child, herself assumed the pressing business of the Wyndram household.

"We had a terrible wash to-day," she would say to Karine on Mondays. Or "We had eight calls this morning. Can you imagine?" Or "The dressmaker kept us dreadful busy all day. There was so much to do."

One night Karine and her mother passed on, leaving bills at said grocer's and butcher's and druggist's. Not to mention a Syrian peddler of lingerie and silks who made inquiry of Julia next day, showing in a penny notebook what sums Karine's mother owed him.

Then came the dogs into the neighborhood. They had been coming gradually, but Nina did not notice their prevalence until Karine, the last child, vanished. But one was warned against stroking strange dogs, however kindly the ladies in mink and sable smiled in encouragement.

And Nina could only cherish Karine of the red slippers as a sad memory. They had been so delightfully, overwhelmingly busy together.

Now Nina was delightfully, overwhelmingly busy with Jude, and he considered this ability of hers to enjoy his work the last touch of charm to her charming self. What he saw was that she interpreted her life in terms of his; what he heard was the echo of his dreams; what he felt was the confirmation of his plans. He had wanted these from his marriage and thus far had not been disappointed.

The first month was a huge success. Nina found much to do, though Mrs. Kent and the auxiliary household staff took that responsibility off her irresponsible shoulders. She bought clothes, replaced household linens, rearranged lamps and furniture. One of the first changes she made was to replace the costumer in their bedroom with a row of antique, carved wooden hooks. Frances Penning, a young cousin who had taken an enormous liking to Nina, took her to a musty shop on Tenth Avenue, where authentic oddities could be bought for dimes, practically. Cousin Amelia had furnished the house but had scarcely lived in it, and Nina was hoping that Jude would notice the changes — some day. She believed the altered character of the rooms — she thought it was altered, anyway, and had Frances' enthusiastic corroboration — would burst upon him suddenly. And then what a surprise for him!

Often Julia accompanied Nina on her shopping expeditions. If Julia liked anything better than spending money, it was spending another's money, especially out of bags that had no strings. She knew, too, down to a dish-mop, just what the needs of the doctor's organized household were, and reveled in buying the appointments which Mrs.

Kent constantly requested. Nina grew tired examining a dozen different kinds of waffle irons, since to her they all looked alike. Julia, on the other hand, enjoyed a sort of *ex post facto* triumph in choosing the best of everything, while her daughter sat on a tall stool provided by the salesman and paid the bills, or had them sent. In her greatest extravagances Julia had always been deliberate, had never displayed the total unconcern for money that was Nina's.

"Mother hasn't been here for a long time," said Jude one night, after Nina had described one of these shopping expeditions.

"She comes here a lot, Jude. Mostly during your office hours."

"Why don't you have her for lunch or dinner?"

"I've asked her. She always refuses."

"Don't you want her to stay?"

"Of course I do. I think she enjoys being here. Mother always wanted a beautiful home."

"Would you like me to call her? To invite her personally?"

"That would help," said Nina.

"I see," said Jude. And he did.

Believing Julia to be a social climber, he had underestimated her. He saw, now, that she was trying her best to keep out of his way rather than bring herself to his notice; to exhibit proper maternal concern in her young married daughter without intruding; to maintain an interest in their life together without desire to become part of it.

In this new surmise, the doctor was correct. Julia cared for the life of society as reported in the newspaper columns about as much as Judson Penning himself. She was

no fool. She knew she had not the education and background for admission into the Penning circle as an equal. She would not push herself to be in it by sufferance. Rather the frog in the puddle, than the minnow in a beautiful lake. Though there existed no reason for enmity, she would not have been indignant had Jude failed in his friendliness. She was too worldly, too wily, perhaps too self-reliant, to care.

XIV

Besides having sharpened her emotions even more than Nina realized, the first intimacies of marriage had produced a consciousness of self, a body consciousness existent in her senses rather than in visible sign of change. The outward suggestion of inner knowledge, that source of her attraction for the boy Burt Fiske, as well as for the man Judson Penning, had been apparent many months before.

Often she felt this awareness in a delicious physical languor. At night, lying beside Jude, his arm outstretched under her pillow, she knew it to be power. Her body possessed power. Her body was the source of its own power, kinetic, like a stream dammed or a waterfall harnessed. Again she found it in the dulcet fatigue of submission.

Long hours, by day, she lay on her back, finding in the relaxation another aspect of secret joy; she lay on her back to read, and searched in books for answers to formless questions, for hidden import in human relationships, and especially for the dual manifestations of nature. Inside herself, there was a seed for which Jude was the life impulse. She liked to read of other seeds, of other impulses.

The world was a twosome planet, man and woman, parent and child. Pollen and ovule. Pollen and bee. Each gravitating to his own complement in an ordered, sweeping grace. Nina to Jude. Jude to Nina. For each force a

balancing force. She was Jude's balance. He was hers. The thought, satisfying as it was, disturbed her.

What if that balance should be destroyed? If Jude should become sick? Or die? Or some other force take him from her?

In a sickening burst of dread, one day, she rushed downstairs to assure herself of his safety. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. A number of patients sat waiting in the reception room. Nina heard a child whimper. Luckily she did not have to pass through that room. There was another door to Jude's consultation room, leading directly from the hall, and on this she rapped. She didn't think ahead. She thought inward — of the seed which might lose its impulse.

He opened the door himself, closed it behind him, and drew her away.

"Nina — for heaven's sake!"

"Oh, Jude!" He stood before her in the flesh. He was there, alive, well, unharmed.

"What's the matter? What did you want?" he persisted impatiently.

"Oh, Jude!"

"Well?"

"Jude, are you all right?" faltered Nina. "I heard a terrible noise down here. I thought — perhaps — some accident."

"It must have been out in the street," he interrupted, leaving her abruptly.

She stared at the high, heavy door which closed him from view. Tears stung her eyes, tears of relief. He was safe!

In the six weeks since she had made this her home, she

had not once given him any token of her existence from the time they had lunch together until he was ready for dinner. This was her first offense. She meant to make it her last. Never, never, never, she vowed, would she be so impulsive again.

A small suspicion glimmered that he might have been tender and gentle, had she come with a physical hurt, a bruise, or a cut finger. And yet the hurt she had brought to him was deeper than a bruise, keener than a knife blade in her flesh. She had lied to him about the noise because she was paralyzed by his curt replies. To satisfy his impatience she had had to rationalize her alarm on the spur of the moment. Still, he did not know that. Her obvious distress had not moved him.

Nina expected that Jude would be very angry and reopen the incident at dinner. She was nervous all afternoon, but decided to tell him the truth, even though he might consider her silly, as probably he would; and she yearned already for his healing touch on the wound he had himself inflicted.

To her amazement, then, he came in jauntily, created a merry to-do about his excessive hunger, teased Nina for her silence, and ate his meal as if nothing had happened. Just as if nothing had happened, thought Nina. The afternoon's encounter had meant nothing to him, nothing, nothing. But so much to her. She would explain it away if she thought he cared. He didn't care. He had forgotten.

Previous apprehension over his displeasure was converted into pique at his indifference, into shock at his coldness. He had defrauded her of the healing touch, cheated her of her scene of retribution. It was not to

have been a cruel retribution, but a high moment of understanding, that moment which had eluded them when they stood in the hall.

She picked at her food resentfully, annoyed because he had forgotten, and doubly annoyed because he was not noticing her resentment.

"Eat your pudding, child," he said. "There's certainly nothing monotonous about Mrs. Kent's desserts. She must be doing a lot of research work on the subject," he laughed.

"I don't want any dessert," she returned moodily, pushing her plate toward him. "Here, take mine, since you like it so much."

Mrs. Kent, entering with the coffee, was horrified. "I'll bring Doctor another. There's always plenty of dessert, Mrs. Penning."

"No need to waste this," Nina said shortly. She suffered from these perverse streaks of economy. "I haven't touched it. Take it, Jude."

He had already dug his spoon into the pudding, still unaware of her hurt. He was happy. And that was his way in private life. When he was happy, he could conceive of no unhappiness in others. When he was tired, he expected her to rest. When he was cold she must put on a warm robe.

"Really you ought to try this, Nina," he insisted. "You're missing something. Do you know who was in to-day? Kane."

"Cain and Abel?"

"Don't ever pull that on him. He hates it."

"Who?"

"Kane."

"Well, who's Kane?"

"Kane Ruyter," he said, mildly aggrieved.

"Who's Kane Ruyter?"

His eyes glittered over the top of his coffee cup. Hers were lowered. He wondered whether she was joking, and why.

"Do you mean I've never talked to you about Kane?"

"Never."

"How did that happen?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"He's an old friend. Our families were neighbors in New Orleans. Funny I never said anything."

"I'm expected to know what you mean to say, too? What about him then?"

"He ought to be flogged."

"Jude!" She lifted her eyes. He could talk with greater ease when she looked at him, when he claimed her full attention.

"Or at least have his income taken away. If he had to sweat for his bread and butter, he'd be famous."

"Perhaps he doesn't want to be famous," said Nina aloud. And to herself she added, "Just because Jude wants to be known, he thinks everybody else must." Then she felt mean, so mean and disloyal. Still, it was true.

"I don't mean headline fame," Jude went on. "A man may work for a lifetime and never get into the newspapers. Only spectacular science achieves that. I mean the sort of respect a man commands among his own colleagues when he's seriously devoting himself to a problem."

"Is he a physician, too?"

"No — biological chemistry. Only he never made the

effort to do his doctor's thesis. I don't approve on general principles of this starvation in a garret theory. It's a damn sight pleasanter to eat heartily in decent surroundings, but Kane's the exception. He ought to have his income suspended, if not taken away."

"Everybody, you know, can't work for the joy of working, without troubling over means of support," interrupted Nina wistfully.

Jude stopped to think for a moment, as if the matter had been put to him in a new light. "Oh, not exactly," he hesitated. "And independence affects people different ways. It's giving me freedom. It's holding Kane in bondage."

The last word, "bondage," caught Nina's interest.

Mrs. Kent carried off the coffee cups, but Nina and Jude remained in their places. They liked to sit thus, facing each other with their elbows on the table.

"Hasn't he enough interest in his work to go ahead? Doesn't he like it enough?"

"The trouble is," said Jude, "he's one of these fellows who needs an outside force to push him on."

"He's not married?"

"No."

"Jude," cried Nina, effervescent once more. "Let's find him a wife. A real partner, who'll inspire him."

"I'm afraid no woman would marry Kane."

"What's the matter, is he crippled?" she joked.

Jude's silence sobered her. He was looking at the ceiling as if to avoid her gaze.

"Oh, Jude, I'm sorry," said Nina. "What's the matter? Is he — sick?"

"Not exactly. But he's so miserably ugly."

"Well — is that all? There are more homely ones than handsome. Besides, he's intelligent."

"More than that — brilliant."

"Then probably when he talks, you forget his face."

Jude shook his head. "Quite the other effect. His ugliness is emphasized by the sharpness of his mind. He has long arms that dangle almost to his knees. And his face is always ghastly pale. People turn from him. He sees it in their eyes."

"People are cruel."

"It's breaking him, Nina. I wish we could do something for him."

Both sat lost in thought. Nina's dark eyes were wide and deep with unshed tears. Jude's plea had stirred her. Presently something pattered against the window.

"It must be snowing," said Nina. "Let's go downstairs. I want to look out — from the music-room windows."

XV

Already the trees along the Hudson were feathered and burdened with snow; their branches waved with the slow, dignified movement of giant fronds under water. Snowflakes whisked around the street light like showering sparks. Now and then a car paddled through the street, leaving a black track behind. A police dog belonging to the manufacturer of brass buttons wallowed on his back, kicking his legs joyously into the air.

"Isn't he funny?" Nina remarked. "He looks like a crayfish."

The stillness of snowfall seemed to penetrate into the house. Jude, standing beside her, reached out as if to draw her to him. She twisted away, ran to the other window and raised the sash. He came up behind her.

"A man can't put his arm around his wife's waist any more," he grumbled.

Nina said, "Nonsense! Why can't we sit and talk without all that display?"

"Even when we're alone?" he insisted, making a playful pass at her.

Laughing, she eluded him. "Why do we always demand contact — flesh — like Shylock?"

"Why don't we drink moonlight to quench thirst? Or eat gravel, like chickens, to aid digestion?"

He turned to the piano. Nina went upstairs for his smoking jacket. When she came down, she wanted to know more about Kane.

"You should have brought him — for dinner, Jude."

"I tried to. He was afraid of frightening you."

"I'm not ten years old."

"Well — the real point is, that he recoils from that shock he sees in the other person's eyes."

"How terrible! Oh, how terrible! Jude we've got to get him here. Invite him again. Beg him to come. If I talk to him over the telephone, do you think he'll come? What a lonely, terrible life."

"To tell you the truth, Nina, I'd like nothing better than for him to feel free to come here at any time. He doesn't seem to mind crowds so much. It's when he's with a few people that he feels uneasy. We might ask half a dozen others to dinner — "

"Do that — to-morrow."

"To-morrow's clinic night."

"Well, then, the next night, or the one after," she begged excitedly. "I have a better idea. Perhaps a dinner is too formal. Let's have a party. Something informal that we can arrange within the week. We haven't had a party at all, Jude. There are endless people we ought to have. Don't you think that would be better? Though it's strange he should want to meet crowds when he's afraid of individuals. Isn't that queer, and inconsistent?"

"That's the way he is," said Jude. "I suppose we're all inconsistent."

"I'm not," protested Nina. "I don't think I am."

Jude roared with laughter. "Oh, no — you're consistently inconsistent."

"Well, so are you," Nina shot back.

"When?"

"I don't remember, but you are."

There was no hedging this time. He planted his hands firmly on her shoulders and forced her to face him.

"You've been pugnacious all evening, child. Is anything wrong?"

"Poof — just because I contradict you — "

"Even before that."

As he smiled down at her, he seemed to regenerate in the seed the impulse he had lately chilled. Just by a look and a movement, like an oriental magician who conjures a blossoming plant from a barren flower pot, Jude conjured out of the dormant heart of Nina that physical consciousness which preserved the balance between them. Under its spell, she was ashamed of her previous chagrin. It seemed so trivial. Indeed, before she could give voice to the annoyance, it vanished, dispelled by his smile. They even forgot what they had been talking about, and passed to other subjects, the matter of Christmas gifts, and a visit from Jude's mother and sister, and a theater benefit soon to be given for the hospital.

Nina looked very alluring. When she went upstairs to get Jude's lounging jacket, she had changed into the purple kimono which he had absolutely forbidden her to discard. She had other more expensive negligees now. This one she reserved for their evenings alone. Jude half believed, himself, that she ought to leave a trail of silky petals after her, shaken from the peach blossoms embroidered on her kimono. They seemed real; the blending of colors was so faithful and the details so perfect even down to an occasional spot of decay upon the petals. He had remarked that the capacity for exactitude apparent in the decoration was the same trait which had won the Japanese their place in the scientific field. And she seemed fonder of the

garment because he could thus link its appeal with the field of endeavor to which he had given his whole allegiance.

Not until they were preparing for sleep did the matter of the party come up again. Returning after his nightly inspection tour of the office, Jude found Nina settled in bed. Though not addicted to haste, she invariably undressed quickly. It was as if her muscles retained a memory of her marriage night, as if each night was to her a repetition of that one.

Nina lay in bed, at the very edge, as far over to her side as was possible. She always did. Again and again Jude warned her about falling out. She was restless in sleep too, but somehow, despite his prediction, instead of turning outward, she would shift toward the center and pile up against Jude.

Now she lay on her back, hands clasped behind her head, waiting. In the morning, she could sleep on when Jude got out, but she found it impossible to fall asleep until he came in. There was scarcely an inch of room beside her, but he balanced himself on the edge of the bed, laughing while she squirmed back to make space.

"How about the party, Jude?" Nina said drowsily. "Will we have it?"

He kicked off his shoes. "I thought we decided to."

"Did we? Whom shall we invite?"

"Whom do you want to invite?" He flung coat, collar and tie off to the other side of the room. Sometimes his aim was better, and he managed to hurl them squarely into the dressing alcove. But if they landed a foot or two short, he felt no concern. Nina had been amazed over his carelessness with personal belongings. That was his reaction from office and hospital.

"Whom do I want to invite?" she echoed.

"Yes — you must have friends and relations you were fond of. The people who were invited to your father's home. Because Aunt Edith sniffs at your ancestry — that doesn't mean our home isn't open to anybody you want to invite. Aunt Edith means nothing to me. Thank God!" he added fervently.

"I couldn't have a party without Uncle Thomas."

"Uncle Thomas?"

"Oh — you know, Jude. Uncle Thomas Wyndram, Dad's brother. He's professor of English up at — "

"Oh, yes. He's a queer duck, isn't he?"

"Not any funnier than Cousin Amelia," Nina protested stoutly. "Uncle Thomas doesn't even smoke, but she smokes cigars."

Jude was stretching out for his pajamas, which hung at the foot of the bed. He bounced around.

"She — what?"

"She smokes cigars. I went to have tea with her yesterday afternoon, and when I came into the library she was reading and smoking a cigar."

Jude doubled over in glee. "The Pennings carry the day."

"There. I told you something about your own cousin you didn't know. She wasn't doing it just for fun, either. She knew how. And she didn't stop when I came in."

When Jude got into bed, Nina drew away again. He lifted himself on one elbow. She meant to continue their planning for the party, but again he challenged her intention. The look he bent upon her had nothing to do with the matter at hand. She knew the look and, as always, receded from it.

From the beginning Nina had resented Jude's power to kindle that flame within her, to whip, by a glance as well as by a touch, that soft, greedy, licking flame into the tormenting fires of martyrdom. There seemed to her to be something ugly in feeding the greedy fire, in flaming the soft, writhing embers to a destructive blaze.

"It isn't destructive, Nina," he argued quietly. Then he snapped out the reading lamp overhead. They dropped into pulsating, quivering darkness. "Why don't you think of it the other way? It's purifying."

"It can't be. It isn't. I don't feel pure afterward. That's reason enough, isn't it?"

What Jude called "the right of love," she called "the might of love"; and might of flesh over flesh was sordid, she believed, the more so if might had its way. It was not that Nina objected because he had power over her. She exercised enchantment over him. She could breathe on the embers of his desire, and watch the little arduous tongues consume him too. But it seemed wrong that she should claim this might of her flesh over his.

"I think you've had your head filled with a lot of adolescent priggishness. It's time you dropped it."

"No, I haven't."

"Sometimes I wonder if you're not sexually cold," he taunted, through the darkness.

She had learned that there could be no deeper cut than this accusation. He felt her stiffen in denial.

"I'm not, Jude. You know I'm not. I do love you."

She was presenting him with the key to the situation but neither thought of trying it in the lock. Because the eternal hunger was never satisfied, because her senses craved consummation by the flesh, and the flesh by the

senses, she resented this tyranny of her own passion. Because at the ultimate moment she yielded with abandon before her own helplessness and his, she wanted to fight the force which demanded that abandon. Even though she submitted through force, she wanted to fight that white oblivion. After fulfillment, she revolted against the inevitable, that to which she had already bowed. Always, *afterward,* she called herself weak, and the thought mortified her until the next moment of disembodied ecstasy.

"People ought not forget themselves so," she insisted. "Giving isn't a weakness."

"This kind — is. It's unworthy."

Heretofore, in his experience with women, Jude had found all the courting necessary before union. Barriers once broken were never raised again. The ease with which he had persuaded Nina into marriage had deluded him. Now he had to approach her with the light of battle in his eye, but the touch of love in his fingers. Each night he was faced with the necessity of new conquest, where the night before he had been victor. Each night he must devise new emotional tactics, though the night before she seemed to have made the final adjustment. True, eventually she gave herself without foolish reserve. Yet he was never sure that she would, and he enjoyed the fray because of the uncertainty.

Mark Wyndram, had he lived, might have helped his son-in-law. In his heart Jude suspected Nina of a bit of justifiable femininity, a streak of school-girlish reserve. He was wrong. Her mother's reaction to the ultimate intimacy had been built on a subconscious falsity. Nina's was an inherent tribute to a muddled ideal.

XVI

Jude whistled as he walked upstairs. The sound of his notes rising louder and more distinct after he passed the second landing, instead of trailing off as usual, burst upon Nina with the force of a terrifying joy. It was a miracle of which she had long since despaired.

Carefully Nina listened for his footsteps. She heard him tramping through the rooms on the third floor, looking for her; and still he warbled on.

Oddly enough, the doctor was whistling a tune he despised, an Italian street melody, internationalized by that international hero, Alberto Bianchi, the tenor. Jude himself, having found it in Cousin Amelia's collection of phonograph records, had broken the disk. But now he trilled away at it, emphasizing with a sort of luscious satisfaction all the cheap tremolos to which the song lent itself so readily.

"Nina! Oh, Nina!"

He picked up the melody again, just where he had broken into it to call her name, Nina was standing on the rush seat of an old ladderback chair, trying to recapture a shade escaped from the bedroom window. Frozen, speechless, she remained in this position until he appeared in the doorway.

"Take me down," she said.

"Who put you up there?" he laughed. "Was it a punishment?"

He curled one arm around her waist and lowered her to the floor; then, without releasing her, sat down, and dandled her on his knees.

"You make my teeth chatter," she complained.

Having teased her into this mild physical discomfort, he was content to stop.

"Guess who was in to-day, Nina."

"Kane," she said promptly.

"I mean patients. I had two famous patients."

"Doctor Drake."

"Hot. Guess again."

"Sir William Osler!"

He hugged her tightly, laughing in secret enjoyment. "Smart child. That wasn't so bad. Because one of them was Doctor Nakamura."

Solemnly Nina repeated the illustrious name, "Doctor Nakamura." In the world of her girlhood as well as of her marriage, the great Japanese scientist was royalty, and she pronounced the name over and over again, with all the solemnity proper to the mention of kings.

"Not Doctor Nakamura, Jude. Not really Nakamura. Why, before I knew about Siegfried and the dragon, Dad had told me the story of Nakamura and his conquest. How he went into the tropics with a microscope instead of a sword — "

"I think your dad was a wise man, Nina."

"He was. Those stories meant more to me than the fairy tales the others read in school."

"And the second visitor was Alberto Bianchi."

Nina flung her arms about Jude's neck. "Right here in this house? Alberto Bianchi? And Doctor Nakamura? All in one afternoon? Why, Jude, you act as if nothing

special had happened!" she finished, forgetting the prolonged whistling.

"Do I?"

"I don't suppose you thought of me."

"I did, child. But what was there to do? They came as patients. I could hardly have you around."

"That's true," Nina admitted ruefully. "But they had appointments, didn't they?"

"Not exactly. Drake telephoned to say he was sending them over. He had to get the Bermuda boat this afternoon. He's off for a consultation. Both men needed some slight but immediate attention."

"If you'd sent Miss Arnold up to warn me they were coming, I might have hidden in the hall, or watched from a window. Just to get a glimpse of them."

"I never thought of that."

Nina was angered. "You never think of me at all when you're downstairs."

"That's a dangerous generality," warned Jude.

"Well, it's horrid being a doctor's wife."

"You don't mean that, Nina," he said coldly. He had not yet learned to accept her fretting according to her mood of the moment.

"All sorts of people come to you, but I never even have a peep at them. I'm up here all alone. It's a wonder you even remembered to say something about it."

"Most men wouldn't tell their wives."

Nina made a sound of impatience. "Dad used to say that too. Then Mother used to answer, 'Don't do me any favors.'"

"Is that the way you feel?"

"Why shouldn't you tell me about your patients, Jude?"

"The relation between patient and physician is confidential."

"I wouldn't shout your professional secrets from the housetops."

"You might drop a thoughtless word at the wrong moment."

"Then you mean I mustn't even mention to anybody that Doctor Nakamura and Bianchi were in this house?"

"Of course not."

To Nina such fidelity to an ethical code seemed exaggerated.

"Now let's get this straight, dear. You're peeved at me for not sharing my visitors with you. Suppose I were in business. Let's say — brass-button manufacturing — "

"And Doctor Nakamura came to buy some brass buttons for his chauffeur — "

"Yes. Do you think I'd call you up to hurry down for a sight of him?"

The idea of either of these men buying brass buttons restored Nina's good humor. A joke, an amusing word picture, a bit of unanswerable reasoning — Jude's arguments were always unassailable at the moment of advancement — and Nina's petulance was easily diverted. He held Nina entranced. He recreated both men for her until she had almost forgotten that she did not see them through her own eyes.

"And Bianchi is even livelier than he's reported to be."

"Did the girls know who he was?" asked Nina enviously.

"Yes, I told them."

"Oh!"

"But what surprised me more," her husband went on, "was Nakamura's jolliness. I'd always heard the Japanese

were a fun-loving race, but I hadn't met enough of them to understand what was meant."

"You can see that in their pictures, Jude. There's something so grotesque — "

"That's it. Nakamura has a natural supply of fun. He seems to be able to interpret the slightest situation in terms of the grotesque."

"I don't suppose you could have invited him to the party," said Nina.

Jude laughed. "Hardly."

"Or Bianchi. Think of Aunt Edith's face if she saw the great singer, here, in our music room."

"I wish you didn't think it your duty to have her here."

"But I love Frances."

"Have Frances without her mother. Aunt Edith hasn't bothered much about you."

"She's had me to lunch and tea several times, and if you hadn't had an operation that night during Thanksgiving week — "

"Mm — when nobody of social importance was there."

"Why, Jude! I thought you didn't care about definite social lines, and all that sort of thing."

"I don't. But she does," replied Jude. "The circle she draws about her hasn't got a new face, so far as I'm concerned. They're all my uncles, and my cousins, and my erstwhile next-door neighbors. I'd rather spend one minute with men like Nakamura and Drake. They're the salt of the earth, my aristocracy."

"Then it doesn't make any difference," concluded Nina.

"Well — it does," argued the doctor, with seeming perverseness.

That for which he had no desire himself he wanted for

his wife. Since his marriage, Jude had been increasingly irritated by the fact that his Aunt Edith, Mrs. Gilmore Penning, had not received Nina in the manner suited to the wife of Judson Penning, and the daughter-in-law of the late Bedloe Penning. He did not care to forbid his wife to accept Aunt Edith's invitations and thus precipitate a public family breach. At the same time, he disliked to have Nina included among those to whom the social left-overs from the table of the exclusive functions were tossed. Probably because of her youth, Nina was too simple to understand the situation.

Aunt Edith's behavior was unworthy of one either born to or having acquired the name of Penning. He knew well enough that she was merely following the convention of her own circle. But the Pennings never stooped to such conventions. Cousin Amelia displayed the real family attitude toward newcomers. Jude felt ashamed of his aunt, and cheapened against that day when Nina should realize that she was treated only a shade better than the chauffeur's daughter, who was going to college and whom Aunt Edith graciously invited to lunch once a year, during the Easter vacation.

The doctor began to undo his shoes. Every evening before dinner he took a short nap, from which he awoke, after fifteen or twenty minutes, as completely rested as if he had slept two hours.

"I'd hardly be started in fifteen minutes," Nina often told him.

"Well — you're a sleepyhead."

Now he said, "Wake me up in twenty-five minutes, will you?"

"Oh, don't go to sleep yet, Jude. I want to talk about

this. You see, I thought Aunt Edith would find out from Frances, and she'd be hurt if we didn't ask her."

Jude snorted. "Of course, Uncle Gilmore would like nothing better than to spend the whole evening here, chatting with Kane and making your mother's acquaintance. I have an idea he'd enjoy this man Calucci you talk about, too. But mark my words. Aunt Edith's going to tow him here very early in the evening, en route to some other place, or very late after another party, and they'll stay a few minutes because she'll say she needs sleep, though she rarely gets to bed before three — "

"If they do that," said Nina, "you have my permission to say, 'I told you so.' "

"Than which," crowed Jude, "there is no sweeter gift from wife to husband."

Already tinged with drowsiness, Jude's smile conveyed in its relaxation something peculiarly male which made Nina prickle all over with that warning sense of his nearness. She drew away, but he had dropped into sleep.

Nina drew a footstool up to the bedside and sat down to wait for the expiration of the allotted twenty-five minutes. She had learned by experience that Jude grumbled if she did not wake him on the dot, and unless she gave all her attention to the matter, she was sure to forget. She watched the delicate hands on her wrist watch finger the passing minutes, and with each minute resented anew the oblivion which was linked with his life downstairs. She ceased even to be amused at the readiness with which he yielded himself to sleep, like a baby or a puppy.

And yet when the instant came to shake him by the shoulder and whisper "Jude! Wake up!" her heart faltered. He was breathing regularly. Only a tired man could

sleep so deeply. At the first touch of her hand he opened his eyes and sat up.

"I'll be ready for dinner in five minutes," he said.

They spent the evening at home. By way of relaxation, the doctor played with an idea for further simplifying the technique of blood transfusion. And since science's way of playing with an idea is to translate its nuances into stopcocks, and rubber tubing, and graduated vessels, Jude worked in his small laboratory manipulating his inanimate replica of the human circulatory system.

At dinner, Nina had questioned him closely as to the necessary equipment required for his evening's work. Stealing downstairs, to surprise Jude by assembling the articles, she had found them already laid out by Miss Siegal, the technician. With a sense of frustration Nina turned to the microscope. First she pulled a single hair from her own head to examine. Then she pricked the forefinger of her left hand and smeared the drop of blood on a slide.

"For heaven's sake, stop mutilating yourself," Jude laughed. "There's a box of type slides on the second shelf there. Look at those if you want something."

"You're not supposed to see me pulling out my own hair," Nina returned. "You're busy working."

"Not so busy that I want to see you hurt yourself for a little amusement."

Looking at Jude now was like looking at the sun. He stood in a cone of thick white light, so very dense, so very white, that the light itself seemed to possess substance, and Jude was standing within the cone of transparent substance. When Nina shut her eyes, bright yellow and green balls rolled out of them into the darkness. She had looked at the sun.

XVII

JUDE's mother and sister Bernice had come up from New Orleans the day before the party, and a dozen old family friends who would want to call on them immediately and with no formality, had to be included in the list of guests. They were careful from the beginning that Kane should not suspect the motive behind the gathering. The others had been asked some two weeks in advance. Nothing at all was said to Kane. Then, three days before, Jude happened in on his friend and mentioned that they were going to be home to a few intimates on that particular night; Kane might drop around if he felt in the mood.

Amid all the efficient excitement of preparation, Julia passed back and forth with the nonchalance peculiar to her on such occasions. There was even a hint of triumph in her manner. She regarded Nina's affluence as her own subtle revenge upon Mark. Languidly smoking one cigarette after another, Julia watched with a practiced eye the two maids taken from an agency for the day; counted silver; checked orders to make sure the Penning establishment had not been cheated; inspected linens; telephoned tardy shopkeepers.

Jude, who had not seen his mother-in-law smoke before, was amazed at the skillful way she coördinated the movements with those of the ordinary household tasks she performed.

"Men do other things while they smoke, don't they?" Nina protested.

"Yes, that's true. But one always thinks of smoking for women as a decorative pastime. Not a mechanical habit, as it is with us."

"Mother's always done it."

"It's strange you don't," remarked Jude, happy that she did not.

"I've never wanted to try."

Bernice, only three years Nina's senior, could scarcely believe that. "Not even co'n silk in an aco'n pipe? Of co'se you tried that. Everybody does. Do come on, Nina, and confess that you did."

Except where it was unavoidable, there was a noticeable absence of "r's" in Bernice's speech. She spoke like a Negro, Nina thought, but Jude had once warned her she must never, never venture that opinion aloud to any one born south of Philadelphia. It was the colored people who talked like the whites! But Nina loved that slight singsong, that throaty inflection which made of Bernice's English a tongue more luscious than the northern speech.

All that day Nina fretted. "Do you really think Kane will come, Jude?"

"I do. Because he thinks we don't care whether he does or not. Besides at about six o'clock I'll call him up and tell him that Mother and Bernice are in town. He'll come to see them. You see, he argues that his old friends are used to his face."

Mrs. Kent was enjoying a victory to which she had long believed herself entitled. Having declared that no cutthroat caterer would step inside her kitchen, she had, for the past two days, been proving that she could make anything they can. Donning white for the occasion, and white gloves, she turned out all sorts of fascinating con-

fections, and she was as careful about not touching things with her hands as Jude was before an operation. Her final success was a cake with a hundred layers. With the graciousness of an artist permitting the rabble to watch him create his immortal canvases, the housekeeper tolerated an audience for the final laying down of the hundred layers of gossamer pastry dough. The girls counted the layers, of course, to be sure there was no exaggeration. Mrs. Penning and Julia tried to worm the recipe out of Mrs. Kent, but she silenced them by saying they must not talk. Even a breath of air might disturb the delicate flavor of the dough. They could scarcely wait to see the thing cut.

Jude had a passion for simplicity. He had insisted that at all times during the evening, the atmosphere was to be just of "having people in," no ceremony, no affectation, no definite program of entertainment. Doctor Calucci's fortunate arrival a few minutes in anticipation of Kane's, had not a little to do with achieving the right note. Nina had told Jude she would not be surprised if he brought a crock of hot macaroni and expected them all to taste it on the spot.

"I hope he'll feel free enough to do so if he wants to," was Jude's comment.

And obviously he had. Jude was enchanted with the Italian's artlessness. Laden, he stood in the music room, where guests had already gathered, and while calling out his greetings to Bingle and Mrs. Bingle, to Uncle Thomas, to Julia, he produced packages from his pockets, which he pressed upon his laughing host. A string of dried, red peppers, a handful of dried mushrooms, a glass jar of hot sauce, and a box of cakes began the pile. Then he swung off his shoulder the two cheeses shaped like In-

dian clubs. There was also a demijohn of dandelion wine. Throughout the presentation the Italian talked in a steady stream.

"Little *bambina* married to big Doctore, eh? Now I must call *bambina* — Signora. This dandelion wine Maria made herself. She picks the dandelions in Central Park, and policeman go crazy when he sees her, but she stands very straight and stiff and tell 'Cesca to go on picking. Oh, she's brave, Maria is. Doctore Penning, take a little wine. Nina, where you keep your glasses? Let everybody drink."

Mrs. Penning's very blue eyes danced. She was a tall woman, with angular features and gray hair beautified by the soft shade of blue she wore. Unlike her daughter, she spoke rapidly, closing her throat and chopping off the ends of words as if her tongue were always racing to keep pace with her agile thoughts.

"I do call such utter unconcern perfectly charming," she said to Uncle Thomas.

The professor seemed annoyed at the interruption. "That man has never learned to talk the English language."

"Do you think that matters so very much? No doubt he talks his own language well."

Julia, in purple velvet and amethysts, was saying to Bingle, "That damn Wop! Bringing his stinkin' cheese into a home like this, and setting it down on a real Oriental rug."

"No more than you'd expect from Calucci," Bingle agreed. "Some of these foreigners never learn to be civilized."

For Mrs. Bingle, her husband's words seemed to have

lighted a tiny flame in the Japanese lantern of her soul. She flaunted just a daub of color. "Oh, I'm sure he means well, John," she flickered. A look of disapproval from John telescoped her audacity right back inside itself.

"Why didn't your sister come, Doctor Calucci?" asked Nina. "I told you I wanted her."

"Oh, Maria!" laughed Calucci. "Maria does not leave the house. Maybe while she be gone, a mouse will taste her cheese, or a cockroach run, run, run across the floor. Maria must watch everything. You tell me where your kitchen is, Nina, and I carry these things in."

Jude was only too glad to show the way. The two men walked toward the door, Calucci with one arm affectionately laid across the other's shoulders. Nina smiled in contentment. Julia came up behind her and whispered, with teeth closed:

"It's a good thing Mrs. Gilmore Penning didn't come in while that fool stood around. Don't you let Judson go eating his Wop dinners. That's what killed your father."

Looking up, Nina saw Kane standing in the doorway, the one which led from the reception room. She knew it was Kane, a short man with small ears pressed close against a big head. His clipped hair cruelly emphasized the prognathous jaw. His long arms dangled loosely, and the long, slim fingers opened and closed restlessly. Yet he bore himself very erect, self-consciously defiant, a man who provoked the reaction he dreaded.

"He's not as ugly as Jude says," she thought. In his protruding eyes, she read a great sadness, the pathos of all things mute, of rocks at twilight, of trees in autumn, of carven statues fixed in an eternal attitude. Fascinated by that sadness, Nina watched Kane until his glance met hers.

She smiled and walked toward him. "Kane?"

"Mrs. Penning," he said, without bowing. As he spoke, he lifted his lips away from his teeth, like a restive horse.

"Nina, if you please," she corrected, perfectly at ease. Jude was wrong, very wrong.

"You recognized me by my face." He was daring her to hurt him. And yet if she denied it, as all women he met would, Kane Ruyter would not talk to Nina again.

She thought, "Poor, hunted Kane." And answered, "Of course! How else do we identify people? By their shoes?"

She was scrutinizing him frankly, in her expression none of that revulsion he hoped to find. He had especially wanted Judson's wife to recoil from him. It would be mockery to their fine friendship, which both valued but of which they never spoke. But Nina had momentarily disarmed him, and to justify himself in his own eyes for a condemnation before trial, he credited her behavior to tact. Still, it angered him that even in the cause of hospitality his friend's wife should possess strength to steel herself against his startling physique. He could not understand it.

As an acknowledged beauty demands the homage of men and women alike, so Kane Ruyter fed *his* vanity by demanding revulsion. It was his pleasure to turn people to stone. He sought no companionship for the express purpose of doing so, but if people sought to look upon his face, let them pay that price to his perverted vanity. From the time when, in his childhood, he had first heard people exclaim, "What a repulsive looking little boy!" he had craved, if not this actual verbal comment, at least the attendant emotion in the beholder. At any rate, he thought

he craved it. What Kane had done was to satisfy with bread and butter a hunger for cake.

The real hunger and the only available means of satisfaction had become so confused in practice that Kane had grown to identify one with the other. But down in that corner of the subsconciousness where a soul makes reckoning with its own body, was an unpaid score which even Kane himself had forgotten. Perhaps he never really knew of it. Only Judson Penning, with the unsentimental, careful methods of the operating room, had discovered the debt of unfulfilled desire. He was right in telling Nina that the cruelty of people was killing Kane.

Nina stood now with her hand extended. "Don't you want to shake hands?" she said.

Despite the blazing lights, that white arm of hers seemed to beckon from darkness. His world had grown suddenly black, even blacker than it was, because a white hand was extended to him, because delicate fingers poised in mid-air to greet him. He had pretended not to have looked at her, but he had seen her for what she was, and knowing, became defiant of the picture they must present to the others.

Nina, ardent and shy, in clouds of rainbow chiffon, Nina, young and soft, in glittering silver slippers, Nina with bare throat on a level with his eyes, Nina stooping to be nice to him. That would be the impression in the minds of the guests. She was stooping to be nice to this ape-man with the ghostly chalk face of a clown. She swallowed, and the slight movement found a response in the muscles of his throat.

"Don't you want to shake hands?"

"No, I guess not," he answered, just as Jude came up.

Nina was not hurt at his sharpness. She did not even call it sharpness. She labeled it as independence, which she admired in others, and rather expected from Kane Ruyter. Now, over the little man's head, husband and wife exchanged a glance, which in the code of married folk meant all was well.

The two men did not greet each other. Jude approached, talking. "You'll want to meet Doctor Calucci, Kane. An expansive Latin who lives in New York as his forefathers lived in Milan. He was a friend of Nina's father."

"I'll meet nobody unless I want to," Kane grunted. "Then I'll introduce myself."

Those two glistening, handsome figures with the stunted creature between them advanced into the music room. While he rolled on his short legs, Kane was conscious of the rhythmic, undulating bodies walking on either side; of Nina's free, voluptuous swing from the hips, and Judson's long, agile stride, modified to suit Kane's shorter steps.

As a matter of fact, Julia was silently thanking her own private and personal God that this man didn't come from Nina's side of the bargain. At least the Wyndrams had no monsters in their family.

"In this day and generation," said Bingle to Julia, "there's no excuse for a man looking that way. Now, I'm not saying he's not a serious case. Yes, sir, very serious. But with injections of endocrine extracts, that man could be made as tall as you or me. Now I had a case down in my place — "

Only Julia and Mrs. Bingle listened, and Julia was sure he had no idea of what he was saying. "Shut up, Bingle," she laughed gruffly. "You don't have to sell me your hospital."

At Kane's request, Nina and Jude surrendered him to Mrs. Penning, whose eyes lighted up with something like real affection. For the rest of the evening, he dominated the room for Nina; wherever she went, whatever group she chatted with, she felt his presence compelling her, fascinating her.

Cousin Amelia telephoned for permission to bring along a Chinese student she had met in her internationalization work. Nina, remembering Doctor Nakamura, said by all means. So Cousin Amelia, in a nile-green satin bungalow apron, trailed in her student. He was not the dignified, polite Oriental Nina had hoped to see, but a tall, breezy youth, striped Freshman cap in hand, and a screaming striped tie to match; a college boy, boisterous after the pattern of his American model, and slangy to an alarming degree. Once Cousin Amelia saw him safely in Nina's hands, she proceeded to ignore him.

There was Doctor Slater, slightly unshaven, giving his studious attention to Bernice. He seemed quite engrossed. She was a tall, dark girl with pleasing round limbs, and hands too large for the rest of her, bony hands which became transformed in Slater's eyes when the girl told him that she had come No'th to New Yo'k to continue her studies in miniature painting.

"Ah've exhibited once in N'O'leans," she ventured modestly. "But ah don't think much of mah work thus far."

He wondered what there was about large hands to render them so skillful. "You ought to be able to do good scientific drawing," said Slater. "Especially from the microscope."

"Ah mean to try some while Ah'm here."

"Come over to the lab to-morrow. I'll show you more

than seven wonders that your fingers will itch to paint."

Escorted by a young boy in her sculpture class, Frances had come without her parents. Small of feature, quick of movement, Frances Penning had pert little eyes set in large, round, prominent sockets. They gave to her face that piquant look of a sea horse, having its eyebrows constantly raised and its eyes constantly rounded to the wonders of the world. She darted hither and thither until she came upon Nina.

"Have you met Kane Ruyter, Frances?" Nina asked. "I'll introduce you, and I want you to be awfully nice to him."

"That male Medusa? I'll greet him if I have to. I met him once. But I can't be nice to him to-night, Nina. I'm all — unstrung." And she was gone.

Infuriated, Nina turned to comfort Kane for this new wound of which he knew nothing. She perceived that he did not need her. Jude was playing the piano softly, while Calucci, bent close to the keys, hummed and rumbled an accompaniment. Kane sat on the piano bench beside Jude, with his back turned to the piano, grotesque even in his evident enjoyment, for the lids were lowered over those protruding eyes, and the broad nostrils dilated with that same high sensitivity she had noticed while he spoke.

Presently Jude and Calucci forgot themselves. The music began to grow louder. The Italian's voice rose above the murmur of conversation. Words took shape out of his rhythmic droning. Then, as if by common consent, all conversation ceased, and Calucci's round, full baritone rang out through the music room.

Both men halted abruptly, momentarily frightened by the silence about them. Then, realizing that they were

trapped, they swung off again with jolly good grace. To Jude's improvised accompaniments, Calucci sang what songs he knew perfectly, banging on the piano and slapping his thighs during the rollicking ones and growing red during the sentimental ones.

For Kane especially, though all listened, Jude played a few arrangements of Moussorgsky, and throughout it all, his pale, shrunken friend perched at the end of the bench, his feet clear of the floor, his body hunched to one side, out of the way of Jude's arms.

When the two musicians resigned, Bernice and Frances whispered into Nina's ear. Nina nodded, and immediately all the young men, the Chinese student, two young internes from Victory Hospital, Frances' escort, and several Pennings from Westchester, rolled up the rug to clear the floor for dancing. Those who did not want to dance strolled out to the reception room.

Jude took this opportunity to conduct a tour through his offices. He thought the men would like to see them.

"Are you coming with us," he said to Calucci, "or will you stay to dance?"

"Me? I don't dance."

"What? Don't dance? Nina, is the doctor telling the truth?"

"Oh, sure," insisted Calucci. "I don't dance. When I was very young, say nineteen, wherever the music and the girls are, Antonio Calucci is there too. But now — well, there's a story, maybe I tell you."

At the word "story," a circle closed in around him. "You know, Doctore," he went on, "how a young man takes what he find, a little flirt here, a little flirt there. One day a flirt in the wrong place. So I go to my doctor and

he say, 'You have gonorrhea. You must not dance and drink wine.' What — not dance? Not eat, not sleep, but not dance? Impossible! But I was a student in Milan myself. I know he is right. 'Remember, you must not dance and drink wine,' he says again.

"I go home sad. Soon is another party and I get an invitation. What can I do? Say I cannot come; I have gonorrhea?"

One of the internes throttled an explosive burst of laughter.

"So I go, and when all the ladies ask me do I not dance, I make my face sad and say, so — 'I do not dance.'" He lengthened his face and rolled his eyes up. "Very sad face, you see. No more — just 'I do not dance.' Pretty soon the girls came around to admire me. They think Antonio Calucci is finished with frivolous life. He is serious. He is a philosopher. So now I put my hand on my heart, so, and my nose in the air, so. I do not dance. I am too serious to dance. Gonorrhea have made me a philosopher. Eh, Doctore?"

Jude paralleled the interne's burst of merriment. Nina, accustomed to hearing all sorts of topics discussed at table, buried her face in her hands and laughed into weakness. But Julia, accustomed to being awakened at odd hours to hear the jokes just brought home from medical meetings, nevertheless thought she knew the proper time for such things. She was even more infuriated because the story was received with glee. She would have liked to see that Wop put in his place.

Jude led the way, and Bingle followed as close behind as was physically possible. He had long awaited an opportunity to "get in" with a fellow like Penning, and did

not mean to neglect a chance for personal contact. On the table in the doctor's chintz waiting room lay the current issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association.* Bingle picked it up.

"Great little paper, isn't it, Doctor," he said jovially.

It was as if he had said to Jude of the Bible, "Great little pamphlet, what?" Jude scarcely knew what to say.

"Yes."

"Wonderful jokes in the back. Yes, sir. Some marvelous jokes."

"Is that all you read — the jokes?" said Jude pointedly.

Bingle's turgid self-esteem could not be pricked. "Well, I read 'em first. Then, of course, the legal column. A fellow's got to know how the law deals with us medicos. Oh — and occasionally I glance at the death notices. Great magazine, I say. Been a regular subscriber for ten years. I wouldn't be without it."

Meanwhile, up above, flakes of dance music drifted from the phonograph, wheeling, tossing, whirling, sparkling, melting into the atmosphere of the house. The Chinese student had asked Mrs. Bingle to dance, and she, gazing about in a panic, but finding no one to advise her, promptly accepted. She could do nothing but a hop and a two-step, which most assuredly her partner could not do.

"I'll teach you a couple of steps," he offered generously. "They're easy."

They went off into a corner, and ten minutes later emerged to test the new knowledge in the open. Something in the rapidity and ease with which Mrs. Bingle had really learned a few steps set Nina to wondering. The woman looked so young now, as, flushed and bright-eyed, she

clung to her partner swaying in complete surrender to her few moments of freedom.

"I think it's quite sweet of Mr. Fenn," said Nina to Cousin Amelia. "No American college boy would notice a pathetic, faded creature like Mrs. Bingle."

"That," retorted Amelia Penning, "is probably an error on his part. He thinks she's his age. A number of the Chinese boys at Columbia confided to me that they have no conception of occidental ages. We all seem alike, except when we have gray hair."

Nina was disappointed. She would have liked to consider the youth's act as a manifestation of national courtesy. "Still," she consoled herself, "Mrs. Bingle won't know. And she'll always remember to-night."

Bernice and Doctor Slater seemed inseparable. He danced rather oddly, as if he had studied it out of a book. What he was doing looked like dancing, and had the outward swing of dancing, yet somehow was not really the thing it was meant to be. Bernice was a fair match for him. Her movements resembled more her mother's speech than her own. She danced choppily, as if the next step were tumbling along to overtake the one which went before, and instead of gliding through the turns, she jerked around in sharp angles. Every time they passed Nina, she heard that luscious singsong of Bernice's voice, and guessed correctly that these two enjoyed their conversation far more than the rhythmic appeal to their senses.

In all the Pennings, even in these young Westchester cousins, the sons of the Judge Emery Penning, there was evident a fine nervous energy, sublimated, as in Frances and Bernice, to artistic talent, transformed, as in Jude, to insatiate ambition, or diffused, as in Cousin Amelia, to

mere good-natured restlessness. And although Jude's mother had no Penning blood in her, she possessed a store of that same energy, very obvious in the manner in which she gave her attention to Thomas Wyndram. She sat stiffly in her chair, almost as if his words had electrified her, and her eyes glistened with a hunger for comprehension. At intervals she interrupted to put to him a sharp, avid question. Several times he illustrated his points by thumbnail sketches, which he drew on the spot, in a little black memorandum book with a short, pointed pencil; and he did not resume his lecture until he had meticulously stowed both book and pencil in his pocket, only to drag them out again at the next provocation.

At least half a dozen dancing couples silently consigned the professor to various phases of theological torture for sitting where they had to trip over his stubby patent leathers every time they whirled by. It was like him, too, to settle himself for an evening of continuous talk in a room where he had to lift his voice above the ring of jazz. Once Mrs. Penning suggested that they find a more suitable spot, but Thomas Wyndram answered, "I'm quite comfortable here, my dear Mrs. Penning. Quite comfortable, I assure you."

He was supporting his contention that the lines of Gothic architecture are derived from the microscopic crystalline forms known to chemistry.

"What is the quatrefoil?" he demanded heatedly. "One of the crystalline forms of calcium oxalate. What is trefoil? Calcium carbonate. What is the rose window? A conventionalized rose? No, my dear Mrs. Penning. A crystal of iodoform! Think of that malodorous disinfectant reproduced in the delicate tracery of a rose window. And

observe the daintiness of these crystals," he went on, drawing a few with his short pencil. "Is there anything which the brain of man might conceive to excel these in beauty?"

"Very alluring, Doctor Wyndram," chopped out Mrs. Penning. "But why might not your trefoils and quatrefoils be modeled after similar plant forms, your mullions after tree trunks rather than hippuric acid, and your many kinds of vaults after the vault of heaven instead of modified sodium chloride?"

The tall, blond interne, having caught the sound of a few familiar terms, stopped for a moment to share in the discussion. It was quite evident that he regarded the topic with no seriousness whatsoever.

"You mean, then, that if Epsom had a cathedral, it would have to be modeled after the crystals — "

"To answer your question, Mrs. Penning," the professor interrupted, harpooning the young man with his cold professorial look, "I must ask you another question in turn, and in turn answer my own question. What is it which gives to these nature forms you mention their individual shape? Their chemical content, of course. The daisy is not a rose because its chemistry is not the rose's chemistry."

"Holding with Jacques Loeb — "

"Ah, I see you follow me!"

"But medieval artisans knew nothing of microscopic chemistry, Doctor Wyndram."

"Precisely. Their fidelity to a cosmic law was unconscious. Something guided them blindly toward these forms, because the chemical crystal is the primal, cosmic basis — "

The men came upstairs just in time for the hundred-

layer cake, borne in on a lace-draped board by the two maids. Mrs. Kent in her brown taffeta dress of state, toddled in ahead to lead the way, like a squat little drum major. Everybody stood around to watch Jude carve the unheard-of delicacy. It was over a foot high and really had to be carved. During the ceremony, for the first time since her marriage, Nina felt a public pride in possession of Jude. The deftness of his fine fingers was so apparent, his manner so gracious and aristocratic, that she knew others must recognize his superiority.

"Want my help with the anesthetic?" said the facetious interne, as his host picked up the huge knife Mrs. Kent had provided.

Jude neither answered nor smiled. His eyes were bent upon the cake. His attention belonged exclusively to the matter at hand. Mrs. Kent sliced the huge sectors into blocks, and then stood proudly awaiting praise. Bernice and Nina kept insisting that they had counted the hundred layers. Mrs. Penning told Julia she meant to force the recipe out of the housekeeper at the point of a gun.

"When you visit us next fall with Nina, I'll have one baked. You will come to New Orleans, won't you?"

"I've heard they have wonderful dives down there," Julia answered.

"I have to take a piece home to Maria," said Calucci. "I tease her with something she cannot cook."

Even Kane came back for a second helping, and Nina pretended not to notice how the others drew away to let him pass, as if he were something loathsome. So she made a point of smiling while she spoke to him, because more than ever that mute sadness in his eyes touched her.

"If you come to dinner on Wednesday, I'll have Mrs. Kent bake another for you," she coaxed.

His nostrils dilated. "How do I know I'll be in the mood for a dinner party on Wednesday?"

The last portion went to Mrs. Holzmann, who arrived a quarter of an hour before midnight. Clothed in exquisite taste, yet she appeared coarser than she had that last time Nina had seen her. The splashes of red on her cheeks were too red, the streaks across her sullen, sagging lips too carmine.

"Well — well! Where's our eminent stomach specialist?" spoke up Bingle.

"Otto? Where do you suppose? Where do all you doctors hide yourselves every time your wives want to go out?"

"Oh — " concluded Calucci. "Patient with a belly-ache."

The young woman turned to Nina. "We were just stepping out of the house when the 'phone rang. And of course he had to turn back to see what the call was. He said he'd be back in an hour. I waited until a few minutes ago."

"Then he'll call for you here," comforted Nina.

"I don't care if he doesn't," she said resentfully. "Well — I guess you know how it is yourself."

Nina did know a little how it was. Several such instances flashed back to memory, but her proprietary interest in Jude's work and that sense of sharing in its importance still overshadowed her chagrin.

"It's a miracle to me that my husband's been home all evening," she said, not without pride.

"Don't crow," the other woman advised. "The night's not over yet. You never can tell."

"I guess you can't," added Julia.

Actually, despite foundation for such fears, Nina had given no thought whatsoever that night to the possibility of Jude's being called on a case he could not refuse. Her mother's ready agreement with Gertrude Holzmann recreated, just for the moment, old scenes of friction between her parents. The air about Mark's widow and Otto's wife bristled with belligerence toward that eternal enemy, the patient. Nina felt enmeshed where she did not want to be. Looking across the room, she caught Jude's happy smile, his quiet air of satisfaction. Her world was all well.

"I want you to meet my husband," she said to Mrs. Holzmann, drawing her away from Julia's encouraging influence.

After refreshments were served, the dancing and merriment reached new heights. When Bingle was not dancing with Julia, he claimed Nina, who as hostess was in no position to refuse. She preferred to have her mother dance with him, since she had invited him only because Julia requested it. Wherever she turned, she was conscious of Kane's attention following her. Yet if she looked directly at him, he seemed to be watching her mother.

Thrown so much upon his own resources, Kane Ruyter had devised many a scheme for his solitary amusement. He was drawing comparisons now between husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, and he noticed that although Julia had sacrificed the plasticity of youth to Nina, she possessed a lush bloom of her own, the heavy bloom preceding decay which was still beyond Nina's reach. Kane preferred the plasticity.

Nina came over, to sit down beside him on the piano bench. He edged away.

"You don't have to sit this dance out with me," he muttered, with eyes rigidly to the front.

She treated that like a good joke. "I had no intention of sitting it out. I want to dance it out with you."

"With me?" ironically.

"Don't you dance?"

"No."

"Haven't ever?"

He had a way of bracing himself on bent knuckles, and swinging his body forward. "Dancing is a clandestine procuress," he returned.

"Procuress?" echoed Nina, not so much because she did not understand the word, as because his abruptness puzzled her.

"Yes, a woman pander. A woman who brings people together for purposes of catering to illicit sex desires. Dancing does that. Draws them together in illicit, vicarious emotions."

Nina's pulse quickened. Her heart beat with fury against him. She forgot for the moment who he was and why he must be treated differently. "What a silly Puritan you are," she said angrily. "That's because you don't know how to dance yourself. It's quite above anything as sordid as you describe. Dancing lifts you above sex."

"And who said illicit emotions were sordid?" he chuckled.

Without answering, Nina got up and flounced off. Instantly she regreted her move. Kane only said such things to cover injury in his soul. Of course he wouldn't dance, or do anything to bring himself into prominence. And now she had hurt him by leaving him. But he had hurt her, too. She revolted against a parallel between dancing,

which she loved, and those tiny licking flames which she feared.

Dancing is a clandestine procuress. The euphony of those words lured her to think about them. Hidden, whispering voices seemed to repeat them in her ear. Dancing is a clandestine procuress. She knew no such feeling when she danced. But wait! Were there not some people with whom she liked to dance more often than with others? Some with whom she did not wish to dance at all? Some who carried her out of herself more completely than others? No, that wasn't it. It could not be.

Still, that was a clever sentence. Clever of Kane to phrase it so neatly. But one of those sentences that cried out for proof or opposition, that lodged in the brain with illogical persistency.

She found herself scrutinizing the dancers. Julia's face was flushed and her firm white arms seemed to rest too comfortably on Bingle's. Were all the men holding their partners so closely? Frances and her escort bobbed up and down on one spot, throbbing to one rhythm, pointedly in accord. Nina tried to shake off Kane's influence. She only imagined these. Yet there was the Chinese student moving his loins in such peculiar fashion that she shifted her glance.

Dancing is a clandestine procuress. Kane sat with his chin drawn in, watching Nina as she watched the dancers. She flushed and tossed her head rather childishly. Jude begged her for a dance. She thought of his arm about her. Of his face radiating vigor against hers. She quivered inside. No — she could not dance, with Kane in the room.

"Ask one of our guests," she said to Jude.

XVIII

KANE RUYTER lumbered about his apartment. With those quick, ineffectual movements which women frequently employ when in a state of nervousness, he set to rights objects which needed no righting. That he was doing this in anticipation of a visit from Nina, Kane was loath to admit to himself, even while the fact rose to mock him. Though the place had thus far been favored by no feminine visitor, nevertheless it was at all times prepared for such an emergency. Kane did his own cleaning and dusting and scrubbing. He cooked breakfast for himself, washed the dishes, kept the laboratory spotless, and washed his own laboratory glassware. Accordingly, he had no reason for this sudden fussy interest except to attain a false, a transferred excellence in Nina's eyes. Any excellence he might attain would of course be false. He could conceive of meriting none in his own rights.

Kane had passed through several stages in regard to his physical handicap. In childhood there was that almost gleeful acceptance, in adolescence an unnatural resignation, in early manhood a thumb-to-nose attitude toward Nature, the buffoon who had played this trick upon him. Then came the worship of inanimate beauty, which phase, in a sense, had always existed subservient to the others. He could not remember the time when a hand-tooled binding did not arouse in him a pleasurable excitement, or a bit of exquisite carved ivory a wave of nostalgia. In

his late twenties that desire to surround himself with beauty he could never possess assumed active form, and forthwith he sold a valuable tract of tobacco land in Virginia left to him by his father and took an apartment high over the Park, on the south side. Here, at the expense of scientific achievement, he proceeded to flout his personal ugliness with soft hangings, fine embroideries, rare old books, silver made by master craftsmen, paintings, sculpture, all the expressions of man-made perfection. One room was walled completely with antique Japanese prints, and he used to sit in it for hours, because their grotesquerie salved his soul.

Just what incident impressed Kane with the childish futility of his effort he never remembered. He perceived suddenly that the background he had provided served only to emphasize his misfortune. He saw himself as a septuagenerian ogling youth, ogling that which could not be realized. Instantly those cool, lofty rooms where he had hoped to know spiritual consummation became intolerable. He sold his treasures to the first bidder, descending to the extreme in the apartment he now occupied. He decided finally that since all he touched must turn to dross, he would acquire possessions of dross that they would not be debased by his presence.

His apartment consisted of two living rooms and two workrooms, in a squalid house in the west Twenties, a degenerate neighborhood where fourteen-year-old girls stood in the dark doorways, mumbling to middle-aged men, and gross, middle-aged women beckoned from windows to young boys in the street. But the rent was cheap, the landlady cared not a whit whether Kane had a moonshine still, or a laboratory, or a menagerie in his flat, and

the district was accessible. With the small income left after the sale of the Virginia land, and the slight salary paid him by the medical foundation which received credit for the result of his work, he satisfied his needs.

After he had taken dinner with Jude and Nina some half-dozen times, walked for several hours with her one afternoon and escorted her to a concert at a last moment request, because Jude could not find time to go, she had promised to visit him. Really, she had invited herself, told him she loved laboratories and would he let her come some time when he wasn't busy.

And Kane, afraid of being fooled as to her motives, answered only, "If you want to," grudgingly.

Still convinced that his friend's wife was only morbidly eager to pry into his habit of living, yet he half feared she might not come, and at the first sound of a taxi in the street, he raised the front window to make sure of her arrival. He was at the head of the third flight of stairs to meet her. He did not want her to knock indiscriminately at the many doors on that floor.

He spoke not a word of greeting, but just turned silently and led her into the kitchen, the first room to be entered from the hall. It was also the living room and dining room.

"Oh," panted Nina, after the exertion of running upstairs. "Oh, how marvelously clean it all is." The coal stove was black as the pictures in advertisement. The wooden covers to the gray slate washtubs were white with the cleanliness of repeated scourings. Even the mangy floor linoleum seemed chemically clean.

"Why, do people expect me to live in filth?" snarled Kane. "Why do they expect gibberish to dribble from

my mouth instead of ordinary sense? Do you think, too, that I sleep hanging from the ceiling with my head down like a bat?"

A frown from Jude disturbed Nina for a day but she had already grown accustomed to Kane's ferocity. "Why, Kane, I didn't mean that. You ought to know I wouldn't mean that. Jude said you did all your own work, and I didn't think you'd have time to do real housekeeping. Besides, when a man tries to get along without women — "

"That's a fiction, and not even a polite one. It ministers to a woman's desire for superiority. There's no special trick about scrubbing floors."

"Jude couldn't do it."

"Because he wouldn't want to."

Kane drew forward an unpainted kitchen chair and set it near the table covered with oilcloth. He wondered how Nina, in her furs, in her aura of glistening cold air, would have looked in that other apartment and, wondering, he could almost see the sheen of her skin against the mulberry hangings. What a fool he was to have given up that apartment.

Nina slipped out of her coat, tweaked off her little fur hat and shook out her curls. Kane fingered the moleskin coat where she had flung it down on the chair, rubbed his palm over the soft fine fur, over the heavy brocaded lining, sensitive to the different effects. The fur was cold, but the lining warm where it had touched her body.

"I don't want to sit down. I want to see the lab," she said, producing from her pocket a small, bright blue comb, and using the nickel-topped, three-ring gas burner as a mirror, she fluffed up her hair. Kane stood deathly still,

watching, suspended as it were in that moment of intimacy. He could not talk or breathe until she had replaced that little blue comb.

"I've got something to show you under the 'scope," he managed at last.

"Have you really, Kane? Where is it?"

She followed him through the dark bedroom, with its white iron bed and dilapidated dresser, the mirror of which was coated with a careful, even layer of wax. At the next door Nina stopped.

"Come on," Kane urged. "This is only a room of sterilizers and incubators."

"This floor looks absolutely aseptic, Kane. I wouldn't dream of walking over it with shoes that had touched the dirty sidewalks."

He realized that she was stepping out of her pumps. "Don't!" he said sharply.

"Why not? I don't even need a shoehorn to get into them again."

She padded across the floor. Beneath the chiffon silk of her hose, the man saw distinctly the form of each of her toes. In the doorway stood the two abandoned shoes. At sight of all the familiar accouterments, Nina gave a cry of delight, as if she could not see such things every day in Jude's office, if she wanted to. Seating herself at the microscope, she looked down.

"I don't see anything. Oh, yes — two somethings or other. Oh, what are they? Amœbæ? No, they're too regular. Paramecia? Some sort of unicellular things, anyway. They're not stained, though. Oh, they're alive. Kane — they're alive!"

"Yes. Alive. Life."

In that clear lake which was the microscope field lay living cells, two cells, the miracle of life. Each had a thin, tough body wall about itself to shut out marauders. Each knew how to absorb food, to excrete waste. Two naked cells, two primal cells, two primal wills, which, as Nina watched, entered into conflict. One hid behind a hair. The other hedged about a pinhead of foreign matter. They met and sprang away. They seemed to play.

Kane introduced a drop of chemical under the cover slip. The cells leaped joyously into the boundless depths of their own liquid world. Leaped joyously, and joyously they met. For a microscopic moment there was no pretense, no disguise between those naked cells. They understood. They knew. They fused for all eternity.

"There's only one now, Kane," cried Nina in amazement. "They've eaten each other up."

"Well?"

"They've engulfed each other. There were two before. Now there's only one."

"It's happening every day all about us."

"No, it's not. I won't be engulfed."

"But you are."

"What are they?"

"They're something I invented," he chuckled.

"What do you mean? They're alive."

"They're one-celled marine forms that naturally reproduce by simple cleavage. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes — they just divide."

"I've made them into male and female. I've created them male and female," his voice was growing strangely cold. "With a drop of chemical, a synthetic chemical of my own make, I force them to seek each other, to attract each other,

to lose themselves in union, and after that to reproduce."

Nina turned on him. "What did you do that for? Why didn't you leave them as they were, simple creatures, not hungering for others of their kind? Why did you do it?"

Kane's lips curled. "Curiosity."

"No," she contradicted more calmly. "Scientific research, of course."

"Which is the same thing."

"Nonsense. Scientific research is humanitarian."

"The men engaged in it satisfy a curiosity more meticulous, less vulgar than the ordinary brand. But it is curiosity, I tell you."

Nina searched again for the thing in the microscope. It seemed sluggish now, spent with effort. She locked fingers about her crossed knees.

"Bernice was telling me about your mother, Kane."

"She never knew her. She's dead."

"But she heard about her."

"I don't want you to listen to stories about her. I don't want you to know about her. I hated her. And I hate her now."

"Why, Kane!"

"That shocks you, doesn't it? She was a handsome woman. I don't mean it in just that way, Nina. I don't hate beauty itself. I was unwanted, I know that. Not only the period of inconvenience angered my mother. She was afraid of sacrificing her complexion, or her soft roundness, or her fine figure. She was afraid she might have to give a little of her divine inheritance to me. And so she held on, clung greedily, desperately to her beauty, gave me nothing, nothing. She took much that was mine away from me."

"You can't be sure, Kane."

"Why not? Haven't I the right to be? I've pieced together bits of information about my mother. I've studied her portraits, and our home was full of them. It was my father's passion to have my mother's face painted by every man who could hold a brush. She was a woman of stone. I was a seven months' child. I think sometimes I was an abortion, an abortion that wouldn't die. Or perhaps a parthenogenetic birth."

He laughed loudly, hoarsely, at his own whim. "It would have been like my mother to have discovered some way of bearing a child — because my father demanded one — some way of doing it without having to give herself. Parthenogenesis. That's good. I'll have to tell Judson. Don't you spoil my joke by telling him."

Far from considering this a joke, and without comprehending that Kane had to seek refuge in scientific fantasy to make an unbearable situation bearable, Nina regarded his cynicism as one of those confessions made to friends to further intimacy. She was flattered that he should lower the barrier for her; grateful that a man of his parts should believe her capable of understanding the complexities which tyrannized him; and confident that she did understand them. Accordingly, she felt obliged to make some return for his favor, to fire him with a new zeal for his work, which she believed must bring to him the ultimate happiness.

Nina turned back to the microscope for an instant. The creature reborn of infusion was swimming about lustily, turning and rolling and darting with a primal ecstasy which awed Nina.

She said to him, "Did you really make these animals

change an age-old habit? How wonderful, Kane, to have such power over things."

"They change their habits when I want them to."

"If you don't treat them with that chemical, do they go along in the old way?"

"They haven't learned to do it of their own free will. They haven't transmitted the desire to their offspring as yet."

"But will they?"

"Modern theory is against it. But who knows? Tomorrow I may overturn that theory."

"Why don't you, Kane? Oh, why don't you? If you can do such things why do you stick in this hole, doing your own washing and cleaning your frying pans. Go ahead, Kane. Keep on going."

"What for?"

"Achievement. Knowledge."

"If not another grain of knowledge were unearthed, the world would live on just the same."

"But even if you don't want knowledge to improve the world, isn't it an end in itself?"

"It's not worth all that trouble."

"It seems to me to be the only thing that *is* worth a deal of trouble. My dad used to say — " and Nina halted. She felt that Kane was not listening, that he was not interested in her father's opinions. The thread of communication had snapped. Kane slumped down in his chair. He lowered his head and drummed on the table. Presently that sound ceased too. Silence pressed close over them. It became increasingly harder for Nina to think of anything to say. Kane seemed to have forgotten her. Once she thought he was looking at her slipperless feet, but she could think of no reason why he should.

Abruptly Kane rose. As a rule he stood stooped, with his arms dangling and body balanced forward, like one not yet accustomed to erect carriage. At that moment Nina was struck with his posture. He appeared straight and square-shouldered, almost as tall as Jude, and his head scarcely seemed out of proportion to his body. Looking beyond her, he murmured, as if to himself:

"I would give all the knowledge I possess and might acquire, all the power I have in fingers and brain, all the fame I have only to reach out for — all this I would give for the love of a beautiful woman. I have never had it."

Stunned and bewildered by this revelation, Nina hardly recollected how she reached home. She seemed to have a dim memory of Kane putting her into a taxi. Or had he only walked with her to the head of the stairs? All this he would sacrifice for the love of a woman. Was it possible love meant so much to any man? Would Jude make that exchange? She tried to think of her husband yielding so little as one hour of his career for any purpose — why, he had not refused a case on the night of their marriage! No — Jude and his work were inseparable.

It was a quarter after six and she expected Jude to come upstairs any moment. Shortly after, Miss Arnold, his secretary, knocked at the door of the solarium where Nina was still pondering Kane's parting words. Doctor Penning was called in consultation and had asked her to tell Mrs. Penning that he did not want her to wait with dinner.

An incomprehensible fury forbade her to ask the girl to sit down and chat with her. She noticed for the first time that Miss Arnold was pretty, with her black hair and regular eyebrows and slant yellow eyes. They were all

pretty, the girls downstairs, and personable, and gay, and efficient. How like Jude to choose a staff that fitted so well into the atmosphere of his office. Nature seemed prodigal, stupid in her wastefulness. Jude had everything, wealth, opportunity, talent, dignity, physical charm, a wife's love, a devoted mother, friends, even a perfect office staff. Constantly he reached out to appropriate more of the world's happiness. But Kane, who wanted only affection, had nothing.

Nina found herself hating Miss Arnold. The girl still wore her white coat, which meant that she was still busy about Jude's work. She sat in the intimacy of his office taking down his words. *She* opened his mail every morning. *She* knew who wrote to him and what they wrote. *She* had access to his personal affairs. All of them downstairs were closer to him than she was. In her belief, no girl could be associated with Jude without feeling his power. All of them felt his power, too.

But Nina had no place in this hubbub and bustle. They were paid for giving, and gave. She, who would pour forth her gifts lavishly, was kept imprisoned in the apartment upstairs. She decided to talk to Jude about sending personal messages up by his secretary. He might easily have spoken to her over the house-telephone.

Instantly Nina thought of asking Kane to come over for dinner. If both were to be alone that evening, they might at least enjoy each other's company. She remembered he had no telephone. She would write to him then, just a little, penciled, friendly note to say she would have asked him only she could not communicate with him. Nina hunted for a pencil and, being unsuccessful, took the elevator downstairs. The girls were gone.

Jude did not return so late, after all. Nina had just started her fish when he swung in and dropped into place opposite her, opening his napkin as he sat down.

"Hello, Lamb. Have a nice time at Kane's? Was he friendly?"

"Why shouldn't he be?" she countered.

"He's moody. Of course, it wouldn't matter to me if he threw me out on my ear. But I'd hardly want him to do that to you. Oh, Nina, did you happen to see that tenotomy knife around anywhere? I stopped in just now to bring it up, and couldn't find it."

"That what?"

"That scalpel with the corkscrew handle."

"The one you're always coddling and fussing over?"

He nodded.

"If you'd give it to a first-class mechanic, he'd make you another in no time, instead of your bothering about a wooden model."

"I won't let that thing out of my hands. But that isn't the point. I wonder where it is — "

"Ask Mrs. Kent."

The housekeeper reminded Jude rather pointedly that she didn't clean the office.

"Do you think Mrs. Whatever-her-name-is who cleans down there might have moved it?"

"No, Doctor," Mrs. Kent assured him. "She daren't touch nothing. I told her. I'll help you look, Doctor, if you want me to."

"I've got to find that," he repeated with a greater show of excitement than Nina had ever seen in him.

"You've got such fine assistants," she remarked. "It's a pity they can't keep things in shape."

Jude scarcely finished his dessert before he was up and ready to resume the search. "I'll look around here, Nina. You go upstairs. You know what the thing looks like, don't you?"

"Well, how would it get upstairs in the bedroom?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I was careless and left it there. Just look, will you, Nina?"

She sauntered out and started upstairs. The doctor, visibly upset, began again to hunt for the treasured object. The scalpel had been given him by a Doctor Montreux, a very old Swiss surgeon whom he had met at a war surgery conference, and who had taken a liking to him. The old man had wanted Jude to have it because he would never be able to use it again. He was eighty years old and had lost three fingers on his right hand through an infection. In his youth, Doctor Montreux had himself made the scalpel with its peculiar handle and series of dents, and there was none other like it in existence. Jude gave a few hours each week to the filing and carving and sandpapering of a wooden model, which at completion was to go to a die-maker. He meant to make that knife famous under the name of its originator, now dead. Not only was he afraid to lose sight of the first and only one, but he feared some damage to it during the casting process.

He found it at last, buried under a pile of torn papers on the center table in his waiting room. Of course, he had asked Miss Siegel to leave it out for him, knowing that he meant to work on it. Only when, with a sigh of relief, he had slipped it into his pocket, did he notice the pencil shavings scattered around the spot. Suspicious, he drew out the scalpel and examined the blade. To the eye, no change was visible. Running his finger lightly over the

blade, he detected minute serrations. The blade would have to be ground. Possibly it was ruined. Still undesirous of believing the evidence, he put the knife under the microscope. The testimony of the lens confirmed that of his fingers. That fine cutting edge was nicked.

Somebody had used the spiral scalpel to sharpen a pencil. The little mound of torn papers bore words in Nina's handwriting. Jude did not bother to read them. Anger blinded him. On one scrap he saw a picture which resembled some sort of unicellular animal or plant.

Slowly he walked upstairs. He did not want to take the elevator. He wanted time to think. Why had Nina lied to him when he asked her about the knife? Was she afraid of him? But why had she sharpened a pencil with it at all? Why had she killed the object which was all but a living personality to him? More puzzled and sickened than angry, he went to Nina. He did not know whether he would talk to her or not until he felt her gazing at him cryptically.

"It's been used to sharpen a pencil," he said dully. "Who do you suppose did it?"

"You shouldn't leave it about if it's so precious," she said, unaware of her betrayal. She had forgotten that she left the torn letter to Kane on the table.

"This is criminal. It's ruined!"

"Oh, find something else to amuse you," Nina laughed. "You've got enough interests, anyway."

XIX

Nina took breakfast with her husband next morning. He had a restless night and was curiously silent. On the other hand, despite the early hour, she was unusually talkative.

"I hate that Miss Arnold," she remarked with feeling.

"What's wrong with her? She seems a pleasant sort. She's certainly expert."

"She — she looks so queer," Nina explained vaguely, "with those yellow eyes."

"Yellow eyes? To tell you the truth, I never looked at her carefully. I think I would not recognize her if I saw her outside the office."

"Why, you see her every day, Jude! Is she only an animated dictaphone?"

"That's a rather harsh way of putting it, but I suppose that's my attitude."

"Nonsense. What color hair has she?"

"Green," he teased.

What appealed to him as Nina's childish curiosity restored a portion of his good humor. But almost unconsciously, the first thing he did when he returned from the hospital was to watch Miss Arnold's eyes.

He said to Nina at lunch, "You're right. She has queer yellow eyes. Amber, you'd call them."

"Oh, you do see them!"

"You put the idea into my head."

"Do you like amber eyes, Jude?"

"No, I like 'em black," he returned with obvious gallantry, and was mystified to see the black ones snap in animosity.

"You ought not to waken so early, Nina. It makes you cross."

"It's about the only time I have to see you. With all your old scalpels and reports."

She was not content to let the wound heal. She had opened it. "You know I dislike hearing you talk that way. I'm not in a business where one draws the shade and closes the shop down and is free for the night. I'm dealing with human beings. I can't put the necessary energy into my work if I know you're unsympathetic."

She brightened a little. "Can't you really?"

"I must have your approval, Nina, your coöperation. You ought to know that."

"I'm not always as hostile as I seem, Jude," she said softening.

He smiled. "To-night I'm in your hands, dear." And then he spoiled it all by adding, "Wasn't it only a week ago we saw the puppets together?"

He had a way of terminating things by a sentence. But Nina must always return to that which rankled. Only a week ago. Seven nights. Again she seemed irrelevant.

"Don't you think Miss Arnold is pretty?" she persisted.

"Can't say whether I do," he returned.

All that afternoon, her mother's blood, which had been asserting itself at odd times, dominated Nina's being. She was fretful with herself for having pointed out to her husband another girl's charm, especially since he had not noted it himself. Jude, in the fullness of his life, could afford not to care whether any woman was pretty, while

Kane, ever in her thoughts, hungered for that which did not interest his friend. Then again she was not sure Jude was blind to such attractions. She remembered that on the night he asked her to marry him she had tried to force him to admit he did have a personal interest in his patients. She had forgotten the incident. Queer how it came back now. And he must have been evading the real issue when he said Miss Arnold's hair was green. He did that, not to be funny, and after all it wasn't funny, but because he really did know the proper answer to her question.

Kane would know. She began to think of all the girls of her acquaintance married to Kane. None of them would do. They would not understand him. They would think him ugly, as Jude did, and he was not. Why could not Jude see his own perfection in others? That was the nobler way.

Her husband had told her he could not work without her approval and coöperation. For a long time she sat pondering this, in her eyes a sardonic expression which aged her face. Again her thoughts returned to that night preceding her marriage, when this competent, self-sufficient physician had promised her there were a thousand ways in which she could help him. Those magic words "assistance" and "service" seemed very concrete, and higher than love. Spoken across the breakfast table after four months, their significance was obscure. She doubted whether they had any significance. Just how much was she doing when she gave him approval and coöperation? Something from within had driven him, even in early youth, many years before he had met her.

A keen though undeliberate desire to tear her husband down from the pedestal which she conceived to be of his

own manufacture instead of hers, began its insidious erosion. That very devotion to his calling, at first the source of her admiration of him, now annoyed her because it thwarted her in the full expression of an abstract love, in the final, tumultuous expression of an ache for perfection.

It took Nina less time to burn with this secret indignation than it had her mother under similar circumstances. Jude's life-engrossment was no longer a cause but an outrageous servility to these very human beings whom he could not shut out by locking the door and drawing the blinds. Not a flaming religion but imprisonment. He was at the beck and call of his jailers, and before long, these jailers, in her mind, came to be identified solely with her own sex. The number of records for male patients in the doctor's file would have surprised Nina. She seemed to see steady streams of women walk in and out of the house, seemed to hear only women's voices floating over the transom of the consultation room.

One evening in midwinter, Nina was a participant in a scene whereby she meant to prove to Jude that his indifference to personalities must be a pose. Though not certain herself as to why she felt compelled to prove this, or what would be accomplished by the proof, she pushed the matter. It was part of this ingrowing grievance which had seized upon her.

She was returning from a skating party. As she stepped indoors, a woman bore down upon her from nowhere, and in gushing, panting, superlative accents began to sing Doctor Penning's praises. He was a marvelous man, a wonderful doctor, a god to his patients.

"It must be a privilege to be his wife," said this

stranger. "I have so wanted to meet you, Mrs. Penning. The lucky girl you are!"

This was not the first time Nina had found herself in such a situation. At first she had been stopped many times a week by grateful patients, some introducing themselves in embarrassment, others scrutinizing her with frank curiosity, others merely to acknowledge her ascension to the throne. There in the hallway, children had been ordered to shake hands with the doctor's pretty wife or speak "Little Boy Blue" for the pretty lady. Nina enjoyed their praise. She bubbled with pride in Jude's popularity.

But after all, there was no need to go on forever. They usurped one of her prerogatives if they admired him. Didn't Jude have enough in her approval to sustain him? The appreciation of one woman would satisfy Kane!

The doctor came up close behind. "Oh — oh," he ejaculated, taking in the details of her scarlet costume, and cap with its white pompom tilted to one side. "When did you get that costume?" Then he rubbed his cheek against hers and made a sound like the sizzling of carbonated water. "F-f-f — you're cold."

"Who was the g. p. that slopped all over me in the hall?" Nina blurted out.

Jude smiled indulgently. "I didn't see."

"She had a heavy sealskin coat on, and a hat of metallic cloth, cheap looking. And two big wings on the side that flapped like donkey's ears."

"Why, what did she say?" Jude detected that undercurrent of sharpness in her description, but was at a loss to explain it.

"The usual g. p. gush."

"You oughtn't to mind that, Nina. Remember, I don't

let anybody thank me. It's my business to help where I can. But there's always a desire to show gratitude. I'm sure she was sincere."

"Who was she?"

"I don't identify the description," the doctor laughed.

"Dark hair," Nina added. "She must have been your last patient."

"Mrs. Korn?"

"She didn't look Jewish."

"Let me see. Who else was in to-day? Possibly Mrs. Dover."

"Its funny you can't remember. She must have been your last patient," Nina repeated. "She was here pretty late."

"Don't be so aggrieved, Puss, and take off that heavy sweater. It's too warm in here. If it's so terribly painful for you to give a few seconds to a patient, simply don't stop for them, that's all. I'm going to lie down, now. I've somebody coming at eight o'clock. Wake me in twenty-five minutes."

As Nina sat beside Jude, watching the muscles of his face relax in sleep, she mulled over their last conversation, exaggerating those points which supported her vague resentment. By what he did not say, she concluded that he knew perfectly well who this woman was. He had defended her silliness too, and really expected his wife to endure it. This was not the service Nina had dreamed of performing. But when Jude was tired, he wanted no cradling. He had only to stretch out and from within came the salvation of rest. When he frowned in perplexity, he wanted no soothing caress. He had only to concentrate and the source of perplexity vanished before his scientific logic. He needed no mentor to point out the glories of the

road ahead. Some inner, far-sighted eye glimpsed distant scenes before trail markers dotted the wayside. Even this slight service she rendered in waking him, he could perform for himself if she were not at hand. He had trained himself to start out of sleep. And any alarm clock would be as efficient a substitute.

Nina wondered what Jude was giving for the love of a woman, what other men gave for the love of women. Of some, so it seemed, nothing was demanded.

At eight o'clock, Nina heard Jude let in the expected patient. She was disappointed to hear a man's voice. She had hoped the late comer would be a woman. Later, the bell was rung again. Immediately after, the doctor walked upstairs.

"Here's an unexpected visitor," he said, stepping aside for her to greet Kane. "I'm busy downstairs. Two people waiting for me. Keep Nina company, will you, Kane?"

Nina knew that Jude never left his office while patients waited. Not even his fondness for Kane would induce him to break that rule. He had told her one patient was coming. Now he said he had two. He must have admitted somebody who did not ring. For some reason he deemed it necessary for her to keep to their own rooms. He had brought Kane up to insure privacy for himself downstairs.

Nina extended both hands to her husband's friend. She did not smile. Behind her dark, luminous eyes lurked a new grimness. Kane's fingers twitched oddly. He stole a glance at the doctor, and perceiving that the other had already turned toward the door, he reached out with a sudden movement, like one keyed to boldness, and seized Nina's hands.

After an interval, he said, "Judson hasn't much time, has he?"

"Much? Not any at all for me."

XX

Because of Nina's growing sharpness of manner, Jude was secretly relieved that his mother insisted on taking an apartment near Gramercy Park for herself and Bernice. Having diagnosed his wife's persistency over trifling matters as a phase of marital adjustment, he gave little attention to her attitude. Nevertheless, he did not want his family to think Nina was so pointedly hostile to his profession. He understood that adjustment was more difficult for her than for him. His mother might misinterpret. It was better for them to be alone.

In the spring of that year, just when Jude had begun to shelve that situation, Nina quarreled so violently with him one night that he was forced to revise his opinion of the cause for her behavior. He had attended a county medical meeting. Nina, reading in bed, waited for him. If she dozed off, she would awaken when he returned. Not that he would deliberately rouse her, but he was always bursting with new jokes after a meeting, and he would chuckle and cluck until she opened her eyes and inquired into the source of his mirth. At least half the jokes Nina did not understand. However, she was pleased to please him by joining in his laughter. Sometimes they went downstairs to forage in the icebox and continue the session while munching left-overs in the kitchen.

As Jude entered the bedroom on this night, he stepped accidentally upon a piece of Nina's underwear which she

had carelessly flung across the room. In stooping to pick up the wisp of white lace and silk, the doctor experienced a flash of memory, and before it eluded him, he said casually to Nina:

"Why don't you get yourself some green underwear?"

Unable to follow his mental process, Nina was startled into suspicion by his question. "How do you know I haven't?" she parried.

"I don't," he laughed.

"I haven't," Nina assured him. "I didn't know you liked green."

"Is isn't that I like it especially. That is — one doesn't like or dislike colors. In their proper places, one must like all colors."

Nina sat bolt upright in bed. Her eyes glistened and her chin, usually round in relaxation, was set with a pugnacious thrust Jude had learned to recognize. Her reaction amazed him. He wanted above all to avoid another of those storms, which, though they might clear the air, invariably left a trail of devastation.

"Wear anything you want to, of course," Jude said apologetically. "Your clothes are peculiarly your own. I merely thought — "

"Out of a clear sky you thought of green underwear. I suppose you consider underwear the proper place for green?"

"N — no. But a pale apple-green is rather attractive."

"Well, I don't wear it, I tell you. Green against the body — ugh."

"It would look rather well with your skin."

"I don't choose my underwear for looks," she retorted with vehemence. "I'm not a — I don't expect mine to be

seen. Only women who expect to flaunt themselves do that."

"Oh, I dare say hundreds of decent women wear colored stuff."

"What's your sudden interest in green underclothes?" Nina demanded.

Drawing up a chair, Jude sat down beside the bed. "You're taking this far too seriously. Can't we talk in friendly fashion any more?"

"Seriously? Not seriously enough. I'm a fool. Believing that women don't mean anything to you. Which one of your ladies did you see to-night? And she wears green, does she?"

The doctor towered over her suddenly, and kicked back his chair. The thud of it alarmed Nina, but only for a second. Then she flung off the covers and began to fumble with her slippers.

"What do you mean — my ladies?" Jude repeated icily.

"Your women."

"That's not my language!"

"Your patients."

"That's better. And now what have they to do with this unaccountable meanness of yours?"

"I'm mean, am I? That's fine. Tell me more." Mocking, she leaned over the foot of the bed.

"And silly. Certainly if this keeps up you won't be the girl you appeared to be."

"Oh, I deceived you? Poor, innocent man."

"I didn't say that."

"You certainly did. You said I was not the girl I appeared to be." She took a few hysterical turns about the

room. "I want to know who wears green underwear."

"I won't mention names."

"Why don't you say you can't remember?"

"Because in this case, I do."

Laughter caught queerly in her throat. "Your memory's not poor now, is it? Was it a patient?"

Nina expected a denial. She awaited a host of apologies, and a list of unconvincing explanations. Instead, her husband gave her the truth.

"Yes. Usually Mrs. Starrett hangs the patient's clothing behind the door. She forgot this time, or perhaps the patient didn't wait for assistance. When I came into the examining room, I noticed the green garment slung over the towel rack."

Seemingly only partly conscious of her movements, Nina tore off her slippers and stretched out in bed again. "Yes — you *would* notice that."

"Naturally, I'm human."

"Really? How condescending!"

"If you go into a room which is usually white and there's a spot of color, of course your eye is attracted by the color."

"Of course — oh, of course," Nina echoed sarcastically, "and if the spot of color happens to be something feminine and very personal, something meant only for bedrooms — "

"I thought right away that I must tell you to get some that shade, but the matter slipped my mind until now."

Nina would have been satisfied with half truths. Now she went white. Even her throat, her arms, her body appeared to share the general bloodlessness. From behind partially lowered lids, her black eyes peered in derision.

Her harsh, throaty, insinuating laughter was like nothing Jude had ever associated with her. When she spoke, the bitter scalding eruption of words paralyzed him.

"That's a likely story! You thought of me when you were with another woman! You never think of me. I don't see why you married me. When you expected famous patients did you trouble to tell me? No — but the girls downstairs knew. They knew — all right. You told them. On the first night of our marriage, did you give up even that night for me? No — some other woman needed you. When I met you in the hall during office hours, did you even look at me? But if some overdressed female walked in with an imaginary pain, you went out of your way to be nice. Oh, I know. I know."

Nina caught her breath convulsively. She was groping for an expression she had heard her mother use. Dimly, from her own girlhood came the recollection. "Oh, I know what you are — you Galahads." That was the word — Galahad. "You Galahads!" she swept on. "Always riding on the milk-white charger of science to save humanity. Oh, that's rich, simply great. Sir Galahad saving the world. Eyes lifted up to the stars — head in the clouds. *You* wouldn't know your secretary if you saw her outside. *You* don't remember faces. *You* haven't any interest except your profession. *You* don't remember what people wear, much less the color of underclothes. Sir Galahad Penning riding a horse with a piece of green underwear flying from the saddle. A pennant of green underwear. His lady's token."

"Why, Nina, I think you're jealous," he managed by way of interruption.

She rocked back and forth, emitting low, contemptuous,

ugly laughter. "Jealous of whom? Of those overfed women who think you're wonderful? Of those few poor underfed drudges who pay you their hard-earned money? Oh, no — Galahad, not jealous. I've been the fool long enough. No more sacrifices for you."

"I don't see that you've given up much for me. I haven't wanted you to. It isn't necessary. I've tried to keep responsibility off your shoulders. Don't expect me to appreciate sacrifices which aren't necessary and which I don't want."

In darkness Jude crept into bed. He did not think Nina was asleep, her breathing was too irregular and heavy. Besides, what could be gained by pursuing the matter further? Jealousy was the most unreasonable of emotions. Rather than resentment he felt relief, as he did after the diagnosis of an elusive case. Instead of an ambushed enemy, he was fighting one in the open. As he lay there, thinking over the quarrel, repeating to himself everything his wife had said, hurt and bewildered in spite of the soothing accents of logic, he was struck with the futility, the unworthiness of such scenes.

Sensible people didn't row as they had just done. Intelligent, balanced people didn't burst out with hysterical accusations. His sense of the fitness of things was violated. He believed Nina, too, possessed that sense. Surely her essential fineness must be at variance with her jealousy. As the older, responsibility for peace seemed to rest on his shoulders. She was very young, after all, and perhaps not yet accustomed to the daily contacts of marriage. With his experience and more lucid point of view, he ought to be able to help her through this difficult period. Still, she had said much to cut him. How could he even be fore-

warned? If she took offense at the innocent remark which had started the quarrel, how would he know what to say and what not to say? Peace at the price of complete silence would be no better than armed neutrality.

Warm and pulsating and very real, hurt and hurting, she lay there beside him, swept, no doubt, by the remnants of tempest and crying out in secret for comfort. If she lost her temper, she was only a child. Perhaps words, mere idle words, should not be elevated to a position of importance where they were permitted to come between husband and wife. Jude slipped his arm under Nina's pillow, as was his habit. She thrust him from her.

"Get away," she said. "Don't you touch me."

XXI

EXASPERATED by Jude's failure to keep his promise and visit her, Nina returned from the Canadian summer resort a full three weeks before she was expected. She did not telegraph her husband. He had thought she would enjoy a whole summer's rest, and wrote constantly that she ought to stay away from the city. But she wasn't going to stand in the corner at his order, she told herself. She would not even telephone him from the station. Behind that idea of surprising him lurked a dramatic desire to inconvenience him by the surprise.

In lounging robe and slippers, he rushed downstairs to meet her.

"Weren't you having a good time, child?" were his first words.

"You don't sound very glad to see me."

"Punch couldn't be more pleased. Only it's so damn hot! You've chosen the wrong time to return."

"Any time would be the wrong time," she observed.

The doctor lifted off her hat, swished off her silk wrap and then padded out to get her a cold drink. Mrs. Kent had gone for a boat ride. Upon his return, Nina reopened the matter.

"I don't know what I would have done without Kane's letters."

"He got a lot of fun out of writing them. Didn't Mother and Bernice stop over to see you?"

"Yes, but only for two days. Think of all the other days I was alone."

"I sent you some books. Did they reach you?"

"I wrote you they did. Don't you read my letters any more? Or does Miss Arnold do that for you?"

"Nina, let's not spoil your home-coming."

"It's you who spoil my home-coming, and my going away, and my being away," she hurled at him. "This was going to be our deferred honeymoon. You got rid of me with promises. You never meant to come at all."

"If you talk that way, we have no basis of discussion, Nina."

"No, we never have a basis. You're always right. Why didn't you come if you really meant to?"

"Some business arose."

"You had time to go to Washington and Albany!" she accused.

Jude's eyes froze. "Have you any idea why I went?"

"I don't have to be smart to guess. Some medical convention, I suppose."

"You take too much for granted, Nina. If I hadn't gone to Washington and Albany, your mother would be out on bail now, instead of free."

Nina's breath ceased. Then she said impatiently, "What are you talking about?"

"Your mother didn't write?"

"Don't be so mysterious."

"She was on the point of being arrested for traffic in drugs."

"That was a mistake, of course."

"Why of course? Of course not!"

Nina's heart pounded. She felt ill with fright. "Don't

be stupid. My mother wouldn't do anything illegal. Remember, she's a doctor's wife."

"I'm afraid the only thing that saved her was her being a doctor's mother-in-law."

"Proud of yourself, aren't you?"

"More than of your mother's association with a man like Bingle."

"Mother's always hated Bingle," retorted Nina, she herself believing the contention. She forgot that Bingle had been invited to the party and to several subsequent gatherings at her mother's earnest request, and now ascribed her own ill ease in his presence to her mother.

"There's no argument about that, Nina. Let's face the facts. The narcotic squad was on this case, and that makes it a Federal affair. Under the guise of sending patients to Bingle for some sort of cure from the dope habit, your mother sent addicts to him to get their regular supply. He gave the hypos, charged exorbitant prices, and your mother got the commission."

"Perhaps she didn't realize what she was doing," Nina ventured in a small voice.

"Your mother's a sharp woman. She goes into things with her eyes open. I can assure you she knows the law. She certainly must have learned from your father the medical ethics of any such procedure, even if the moral aspect left her unmoved. You talk about a doctor's wife! Your father's been shamed by his wife's association with a man like Bingle."

"He was my father's friend," Nina flared.

"I doubt it. Not from what you've told me about your father. Certainly he couldn't have approved of Bingle's practices."

"What's the matter with Bingle?" she said in a sullen tone.

"Anybody can see. He's a medical mountebank. A charlatan. A western medicine man. More's the pity that he was graduated from a reputable college. He's reverted to type. He ought to be out selling fake oil stock. I know the kind of establishment he runs — where you can have anything done, from an appendectomy to a scalp massage, no questions asked, a hundred dollars down and the balance before the first incision is made, and everything is elevated to the seriousness of an 'operation.' "

Nina sat motionless, fingers locked, eyes down. Though Jude thought her impressed by the situation, he could not help unburdening all the annoyances of the past few weeks.

"It's over now. But think of what it meant to me, Nina, to have my wife's mother even involved in malpractice. The husband of a woman who'd been going for these so-called treatments started the investigation. I had to keep it out of the newspapers, out of the records. That's why I went to Washington and Albany. You'll never know what wires I had to pull to hush this up. It might have cost me my appointment at the hospital."

"You had nothing to do with it."

"Who would believe that? Don't you see how easy it was for my name to be linked with the scheme?"

Nina's sulky manner changed to one of defiance. "What are you blaming me for?"

"I'm not. Don't be so irritable, Nina. Certainly you're not accountable for your mother's behavior. But you certainly ought to know how she endangered my position. My whole career was threatened. All that I've worked for — all I might ever accomplish."

"You — you — you — " Nina interrupted. "Always yourself. That's all you think about — yourself. You didn't care about saving Mother, but only yourself. You didn't care that she might be punished — "

"She deserved to be. Don't forget that, Nina. She had no defense."

"Isn't the need for making a living a defense?"

"Not that way, Nina; please don't let your emotions warp your sense of honor."

Nina flung out her arm in a gesture which swept ash tray, cigarette box and book off the end table beside her. The crash seemed to echo some conflict, some discord raging within her.

"A lot you ever did to help Mother earn a living! All you do is hand out righteous talk."

"I didn't know she was forced to."

"Why didn't you ask?"

"Why didn't you say so?"

"How did you think she lived? On thin air — like an orchid?" Nina disregarded the fact that she herself had given the problem of Julia's finances no attention. Everything, including this new disaster, was Jude's fault. Everything. Everything! His smugness was the cause of all disaster.

"I assumed that your father left enough for her comfort."

"You make me ill — assuming such things. You think everybody is like you and your family. All the whole lot of you have to do when you want something is to dig down into your pockets and the money's there. Somebody's always leaving money to some Penning or other. We're not all born with platinum spoons in our mouths. Though

we're just as good as those who are. My father might have belonged to the Sons of the Revolution, if he'd put any stock in such nonsense."

The doctor set his lips in a thin, straight line. "You drive me frantic when you're so utterly illogical."

"Oh — I'm that among other things?" in an acid voice.

"You certainly are."

"And you're not?"

"I think I'm not. Good Lord! What have the Sons of the Revolution got to do with this?"

Nina folded her hands in mock resignation. "Have it your way. You're right and I'm wrong. I'm always wrong. Everything I do is wrong."

"It's not a question of who's right or wrong. We've got to understand each other, that's all."

"I understand well enough."

"Statements like that don't mean a thing, Nina. I merely wanted you to know why I couldn't come up to visit you. It's all over, now. And you'd better ask Mother to come to live with us."

"After all you've said about her? I should say not. She wouldn't want any favors from you."

With jerky, nervous steps, Nina hurried across the room to the telephone extension. Deliberately she called Julia's number. A strange woman who said she was Mrs. Wyndram's maid answered on the other side. It was news to Nina that her mother had a maid. She said nothing to Jude, merely passing through the room as if there were a hole in the air where he sat.

Nina had come home three days before Mrs. Gilmore Penning's outdoor fête which, this year, she was giving for the benefit of Victory Hospital, where Jude was sur-

geon. Not until Aunt Edith stopped at the house, on the day after this new estrangement, to find out whether Jude could give her some help, did Nina remember that she would have missed the gayety had she remained in Canada. She broke her silence to point out to Jude that he had seemed willing to have her away at such a time.

"Did you care especially? I didn't know. I thought it better for you to have a rest than be caught in all that excitement."

Aunt Edith bore Nina back to Long Island with her. There was so much to do, so many assistants were needed, wouldn't Nina stay right on until after the merriment? Nina gladly consented. The strained atmosphere of her own home was oppressive. From the moment when, in Aunt Edith's presence, Jude bade his wife good-by, until he stepped out of a taxi at the Japanese entrance to the Gilmore Penning estate, husband and wife had not spoken to each other. Twice Jude had telephoned, but both times Nina was out on the grounds and could not be found.

The many gay hours of preparation refunded Nina's store of light-heartedness. Besides, the realization that Jude had said nothing of her mother's defection to his mother or any other member of his family, softened her rancor. Now that he had kept this second promise and was actually on the spot, now that she really saw him passing through the gate, greeting friends, stopping at every turn to chat with strangers, she cherished no interest in a quarrel three days old. Even while he gave his cordial attention to others who waylaid him, he was looking for Nina, and when finally he spied her, he said to the man with whom he was engaged:

"Pardon me. There's my wife. I haven't seen her for a long time."

Their meeting bore no trace of the recent alienation. To kiss her, he drew her out of the glare of a great orange lantern.

"Flowers? Will you buy my flowers, Doctor Penning?" she laughed, holding out her supply of them.

He squeezed her face between his smooth palms. "If you offer one at a time, I'll buy ten thousand."

All the attractions peculiar to a county fair were offered that night on the numerous lawns surrounding the great house over which Aunt Edith ruled in summer. Only the Japanese show gardens on the shores of the private lake were closed to fête subscribers. A carrousel, shooting galleries, a palmistry tent, a silhouette cutter, a phrenologist, a sword swallower. Nina conducted Jude on a personal tour. Hot corn on the cob, frankfurters and sauerkraut, roasted peanuts, ice-cream cones, frozen snowballs flavored with bright-hued fruit extracts. Another section held the balloons and paper hats, the tin horns and drums. Good costumes and enough young people who adored impersonation made possible a prize poultry and cattle show. Out of clay, Frances and a few friends had modeled an exhibit of freak vegetables, and they were selling quite rapidly at huge prices.

Nina did not care that Jude could not be at her side constantly. She did not especially want his personal attention. Enough that he had given up a night, that they were constantly colliding with each other in odd corners and experiencing the joy of reunion, that every few moments he hunted her out to introduce her to this one, or that one. Wherever the name "Penning" was mentioned, Nina felt

people regarding her with cool scrutiny. They made her feel who and what her husband was. And she knew she could withstand their scrutiny.

She wore sapphire chiffon, cut low on the shoulders. In the hollow of her throat lay a single sapphire mounted in platinum, a gift from Jude's mother. She was selling flowers and, instead of carrying a half dozen at a time, as the others did, she carried huge masses of them and seemed always to be prettily staggering under the weight of luscious blossoms.

Jude formally opened the fair by a simple, direct speech. As always, he made a dignified figure. All about Nina, uninitiated merrymakers were asking each other who this man was, and when, after his brief talk, he came directly to her and thus openly claimed her before all, she was ready to cry with joy and pride.

Once Nina caught a glimpse of Kane, but the surge of a crowd caught him and bore him away. Jude had not located him either. At about eleven-thirty, Nina saw Jude hurriedly approaching, a certain eagerness in his gait.

"Brown tells me there's a very peculiar case in one of the old residences ten miles out on the road. I'd like to run over and see the woman. He'll drive me out. It won't take more than an hour. Do you mind, dear?"

His request surprised Nina but did not anger her. He had asked her if she minded, thus leaving the decision to her graciousness, and that was solace. In addition, she was attracting so much notice herself that she felt willing to grant Jude the right to enjoy himself in his own fashion.

"It won't take more than an hour," he apologized. "You will probably be busy here until two o'clock."

"Go ahead," she said generously, giving him a little push. "I never had a better time in my life."

She watched him thread his way through the crowds. Here and there a number of men stood aside respectfully to let him pass. There was something romantic in his leaving, with her permission, the brilliant lights, the music, the fun, on an errand of mercy. Turning, Nina found Kane at her elbow.

She laughed confidently. "I'm deserted again for an hour or so."

"Not deserted — with me here," said Kane. "I've tried to get near you all evening. I was afraid I'd frighten your customers away."

"I don't like you to talk that way, Kane. You know it."

"Too bad I forgot to bring my motley, my cap and bells. Here I could play the fool to you without inviting vulgar comment. This is where I belong — at a carnival, where values are distorted."

"What a lot of nonsense! Relieve me of these flowers, Kane, will you please?"

Kane Ruyter kept at Nina's side all night. She did not notice the passage of time. It seemed quite early to her when a detective came to escort her back to the house where receipts were to be turned in personally to Aunt Edith. With a sense of shock, Nina discovered it was one-thirty. Jude had not yet returned. He had done as he always did. This night, for all its perfect beginning, was to be marred the more by Jude's neglect. Suddenly she felt exhausted. Mrs. Gilmore Penning was enthusiastic in praise of Nina's work, and most solicitous over her weariness.

"I told Judson he might have one of the cars for the trip home. The trains are poor at this hour. I thought you

might want to stay over, but he said that was impossible. I'll have the car out in a moment and Dobbin will get your wraps."

To walk out to the veranda, Nina leaned on Kane's arm. She did not tell Aunt Edith that Jude was not there to take her home. There was mute sympathy in Kane's eyes.

"I suppose Judson is detained," he ventured.

"Somehow he usually is," was Nina's sharp retort.

"Do you want to wait?"

"No."

Kane helped Nina into the car and suggested that she stretch out and try to rest.

"There'll be no room for you," she said dully. "I don't want you to sit up front. I want you to be near me."

"I'll sit on the floor."

Every time they passed a road light, the rays flickered over the strange figure squatting at Nina's feet. She could not sleep as he advised. She had never seemed so wakeful. Just once Kane broke the tense silence.

"I wish I could do something, Nina."

Arriving home three quarters of an hour after Nina, her husband found her savagely pulling dresses from the closets and trinkets from drawers.

"What's happened?" he wanted to know.

"I'm moving to the guest room."

"Are you ill, Nina?"

"No, I'm just sick of it. Sick of being deserted like a waif. Always imposing on somebody else to take me home.

"I got back right after you'd gone."

"What did you think I was going to do? Wait around? I was too tired. You said you'd be back in an hour."

"I thought you might stay the night."

"And have everybody know you had left me again? But you didn't care. I'm nothing. I'm nobody. I'm not a Penning of Louisiana. It doesn't matter how you treat me. If you had no time for me, you shouldn't have married me."

Jude came closer and made as if to take her in his arms. "I'm sorry," he began. "I thought you were busy and it didn't matter whether I was there or not. Only that woman was a very strange case — "

"Don't touch me!" Nina shrieked. "That woman! You and your women! Always some other woman who needs you before I do. On the night we were married there was another woman. Even that night wasn't mine. When you expected illustrious patients you told the girl downstairs, but not me. When I stopped to talk to you in the hall, your thoughts were elsewhere. Always somebody else."

Words only partially understood years before, yet firmly lodged in her memory rose automatically to her lips. "Don't touch me, I tell you! Your fingers are tainted. You've got the touch of some other woman on you every time you come to me. You reek of women. Their ghosts follow you around, into this very room. Your clothes are flavored with them. Don't touch me, I say. Don't try to stop me. Let me pass."

She dashed by him, frenzy drying the first tears to sting her eyes. She locked herself in the guest room. What a mockery that was! She had no right even here. She was not even a guest in her own home. She was nothing, a stranger, had been a stranger from the beginning. Cousin Amelia had furnished the house; Mrs. Kent managed it; she herself had never possessed any authority. Jude's mother and sister thought her beneath them. They would

not accept her hospitality. Aunt Edith didn't consider her an equal. Jude had said so himself. Hadn't she been insane not to take his hint then?

With febrile intensity, Nina catalogued her wrongs. She sat in the midst of all the beautiful things he had provided for her and reviled his family, his profession, his unshakable assurance. Twice Jude knocked at the door but she did not answer. She forgot nothing. Small and large alike, the annoying incidents of their life together marched before her in full regalia of war, each thrusting a hidden spear into her side. Conversations to which she had attached no significance, in retrospect bristled with implied insults.

Their marriage had been a rich man's whim. He had never told her that he loved her in so many definite words. Then he must not have loved her. He had never asked her if she loved him because obviously he must not have cared. All these months she had been watering flowers in the rain — giving to him who had everything. He had flung back at her those gifts for which Kane would exchange all his knowledge and achievement.

As Jude had thwarted her on their marriage night, so had he done throughout succeeding days and nights. She did not love Jude, she told herself. She loved the man who was ready to sacrifice his life for the love of a beautiful woman — Kane.

In a closet in the room to which she had exiled herself, Nina found a suit case. She piled a few things into it, put on a tinseled wrap and, as she was, in sapphire dress and silver slippers, ran out to the street. Through the quiet halls she ran, not caring whether her husband heard or saw. Out of the door she hurried, into the blackest night

of all the blackness before dawn. Out of the door without so much as looking back. In the nearest side street, she found a taxi.

When he heard the knock at the door, Kane was sitting at his kitchen table reading.

"Nina!" he cried aghast. "Nina, what's happened?"

"I had no money to pay for the taxi, Kane. I forgot my purse."

He pattered down the uncarpeted wooden stairs. He could not return too soon. She was not hysterical as on that first night with Jude. She was calm, gloriously calm.

"Nina what's happened?"

"I'm here, Kane," she said with a wistful smile.

"Where's Jude?"

"He's in that house which was never my home."

Seeing him now trembling before her, Nina knew she could only be proud of her behavior. Within her was a great void he could fill. She took his face between her hands, stroking it, smoothing his forehead, caressing his hair. She caressed his ugly face with her white fingers until he paled to the whiteness of her hands.

"You said you would offer everything you have for the love of a beautiful woman. People tell me I am beautiful. You will give me your knowledge and I will give you —"

She broke off. The man stood stricken with a fearful bliss. Nina carried her bag into the bedroom with the waxed mirror. When Kane heard the snap of the lock and the soft murmur of silk, he walked after her.

XXII

Always after fulfillment, Nina had revolted against the inevitable. Always, afterward, she had resented the power of love to hurl her into oblivion. But how was Kane to know? She was tearing him to bits as one tears a discarded paper. She had given him one night out of all eternity and now, at noon, was leaving him. No sunshine flooded the bedroom, no glory of daylight. Only the white glare of a blank airshaft wall made a brighter spot where a tiny window was cut.

He followed her out into the kitchen. Grief silenced his tongue. Was there some magic word he might say to keep her always with him? It was hardly twelve hours since she had changed the world for him. Now she was going.

The man sat heavily in a chair. "You're going back to Jude?"

"No."

"You will not come back here?"

"No. Not ever."

"Then why did you come at all?"

He would not look at Nina. Perhaps he too saw she felt unclean. She felt vile, mean, despicable. He was right. Why had she come at all? She had offered him that which she was not willing to give more than once. She could think of him only with his mouth half open, his eyelids relaxed so that the white eyeball was visible when he slept after joy. She had fooled him into thinking she had love

to lavish. She could not stay now with the coming of daylight.

This time she looked back. Revulsion for the man sickened her even while she knew she had done a despicable thing. He had buried his face in his hands, and his body was recast — in lines of black desolation.

BOOK THREE

BIRTH

XXIII

The Superintendent of Nurses in a hospital is considered a devil, with the power to assume a thousand shapes. She seems to slip through keyholes, float over transoms, fly in at windows, read unspoken thoughts, and detect infringement of the rules while the infringement is still only a desire in the heart of the probationer. She is monarch of her domain. She is the Law, and there is no appeal. She can fine the girls, forbid them to leave the grounds during their leisure, assign them to the hardest tasks, spy on them.

Given gray trousers, a coat with brass buttons and a peaked cap, Mrs. Sarah Dunn, Superintendent of Nurses in the hospital where Nina was in training, would have made an excellent subway policeman. The girls told Nina this shortly after she entered, but she encountered no personal proof of it until the eighth month of her course. She had weathered the four months' probation period without a reproof from any superior. She had passed the six months' landmark, when several others were asked to leave. She was known to be an earnest, hard worker, quick to learn and eager to serve. Thus far, her record bore no demerits, and accordingly she had entered into conversation with Mrs. Dunn only twice — once when she applied for admission to the hospital, a few weeks after she left her husband, and a second time when she was presented with her student's cap.

The incident which brought Nina under surveillance was no insignificant one in a world where military discipline obtains. Among the students from the various medical colleges who were assigned to periods of bedside practice in the hospital was one Dion O'Connor. His fellow students liked him, envied yet admired his audacity and so talked of him often. The professors entertained high hopes for him. He possessed wit and charm and an aptitude for the profession. He had yellow hair curled in a great mop over his head, and dark, wheedling eyes.

"You know what I mean," Nina's informer explained. "Nice eyes. A little fresh — but not too fresh. And his coloring sure is like yours, hair and eyes just the same."

All this Nina heard before she saw him. She was neither interested nor desirous of meeting him. She let the girls talk because they had to have an outlet for the dreams they wove around Dion O'Connor. Except for the constant chatter about him, Nina would have forgotten his existence. For eight months, her world had turned in its ordered course. Then Dion O'Connor obtruded himself into it, hurled himself against it like a meteor run wild.

One day, as she came along the main hall carrying a medicine glass containing an ounce of an expensive drug, this tall buoyant figure stepped out of a group near the elevator. From the corner of her eyes she saw him approach her, smiling as he came. She quickened her steps to avoid him. No quickening of steps had ever thwarted Dion O'Connor. He blocked her path and stretching out both hands, cried:

"Sure, it's my long-lost sister." Then like a flash, he slipped his arm through hers, bent his knees until his face was on a level with hers. They were almost cheek to

cheek. "What do you say, fellows? Two chips off the same block."

A gust of laughter greeted his remark. In sudden panic, Nina strained away. Since the night she had gone to Kane, no man had touched her. Since the morning she had made her choice, she had permitted no man to enter her thoughts, the rules were definite about social intercourse between the nurses and staff and, temporarily, these medical students were considered staff. Nina struggled to release herself.

"Please let me go," she said, "I'm called to Emergency. They've just brought a man in."

"The lucky stiff! I'd get under a five-ton truck myself, if I'd wake up to find you over me."

Nina heard no footsteps come up behind her. She saw no shadow fall over the group. It was said Mrs. Dunn had no shadow. Only a thin, cutting voice severed the air between them. It dripped upon Nina like ice melting down her spine.

"I believe you are on duty, Miss Wyndram!"

Dion released Nina in leisurely fashion, not exactly defiant of authority, but non-conforming. The slight activity in the main hall seemed suddenly to cease. Nina dared not raise her eyes to Mrs. Dunn. Unapproachable under the best of circumstances, she was now altogether frightening. Her coarse hair, mixed gray and black, was frizzed out from under her cap like steel wool. Current opinion held that she treated her hair with some special mixture to render the gray more wiry, more steely.

"Oh!" gasped Nina. "Oh!"

The force of the shock weakened her grip on the medicine glass. It crashed to the cement floor, broke into a

hundred glittering splinters and spread the precious contents in a dark puddle about her.

Mrs. Dunn produced her little black Book of Doom, in which she recorded the day's offenses. No item in it was ever effaced. It stood there for all time, to be reckoned against the offender when honors were given out. Nina's heart sank. Everything that had held her together during these months seemed to have dropped away. Mrs. Dunn wrote in the book, and while she wrote, she spoke; and as she spoke, her heavy jowls moved in a way which terrorized Nina. She appeared to be biting her words off a huge chunk of speeches which she kept prepared for all occasions.

"You will clear away this wreckage, Miss Wyndram. Return to Emergency, and meet me in the office at six."

And she was gone as mysteriously as she had come. The skirts of other graduate nurses crackled when they walked. Their rubber-soled shoes made a slight padding sound in contact with stone floors. Not so Mrs. Dunn's. She wore disciplined uniforms. They did not betray her approach by so much as a hiss. A sober group of boys hung about. Dion O'Connor seemed chastened, but his good humor persisted in his eyes.

"K. P.?" he questioned.

"Probably worse," Nina replied, no anger in her voice. She had noticed herself how impossible it was for her to summon the rancor which, in that period before parting with Jude, had dominated her existence.

"The old cackler wouldn't dare do anything to you, for a harmless bit of fun," he returned confidently.

"You don't know very much about hospital discipline," said Nina. She spoke with such dignity that Dion stepped

aside to let her pass. Without displaying a conscious air of superiority, she had let him feel her detachment.

As she walked down toward the broom closet under the main stairway, she heard one of the boys say:

"They'll take the cost of this out of her salary. I'll bet it's expensive stuff too. The poor kids only get fifteen a month."

"Darn it, I'm sorry. I'll make it up to her," Dion answered.

Upon her return with the necessary equipment for cleaning up, Nina observed, to her relief, that the boys had scattered. It was not that she minded being watched at the lowly work of scrubbing. But she did not want to be watched with pity. Her only emotion was one of sadness, that the routine of a day had been destroyed by a stranger, that the stranger was a man.

Just as Nina knelt and dipped the brush into the hot soapsuds, she became aware of a figure standing over her. It was Dion O'Connor. Unexpectedly, he knelt beside her and tried to take the brush from her hands.

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss Wyndram," he apologized. "Please let me clean this mess for you. You know I worked my way through the first year by washing dishes and scrubbing floors in a cafeteria."

For just a flash, Nina caught a glimpse of that which attracted the girls to Dion O'Connor. A little sorry look in his eyes, a rueful quality in his voice, a boyish, wheedling expression about the mouth.

"If you're really sorry," she said, "you'll get off this hall as quickly as possible. You can't help matters any by being seen here with me again. Mrs. Dunn will be along soon to inspect my work."

"I'll get out of the way after I've cleaned this up," he insisted.

Nina felt the eyes of the telephone operator bore into her back. The gaze of the clerk at the information desk burned on her cheek. The elevator man stood with arms akimbo, staring in righteous amazement at the sight of these two, kneeling over a pail of soapsuds. Already Nina could see herself stripped of her uniform. She lifted her her eyes to Dion O'Connor, and her pale face under the white cap startled him with its shining intensity.

"I want to tell you something," Nina said quietly. "It will not matter to me if I'm expelled."

"Expelled? Oh, not for this."

"Probably. It won't matter. But there are those here to whom it matters very much. Only last week we took up a collection for a girl who had no friend to go to when Mrs. Dunn ordered her out. And she had no money to pay for a room. Her family lives in Canada, and she was ashamed to go home to them in disgrace. There's no law that can touch you. The rule doesn't say you musn't talk to us. The rule is that we must not talk to you. The burden rests with us to preserve that professional relation — in which we are the subordinates. The kind thing to do is to ignore us, since we bear the punishment."

In obedience to her command, in deference to that aloofness which thrust him from her as before, he rose from his kneeling position and dusted off his trousers. What he said, however, paralyzed her to such an extent that he had reached the entrance to the superintendent's office before Nina came to herself.

"Since you won't let me share the burden," was his answer, "I'm going to tell Mrs. Dunn it was my fault."

Nina dared not call after him. Mrs. Dunn might hear. She dared not follow to stop him. Mrs. Dunn might materialize at any moment. Dion could only injure her further by intercession. There was no way to stop him.

Nina had not been entirely truthful in telling Dion that she did not care whether she was expelled. She cared very much. Nothing else mattered. She had gone through life spiritually orphaned. Once for a brief period she had been farmed out of the orphanage — to Jude. Once, for a briefer period, she had been offered for adoption — to Kane. Both experiences had served to emphasize her spirit's loneliness. The instant she had settled in the hospital, that sense vanished. Something in her knew a kinship with this world. Here she was part of an institution, of a system. Her slightest movement, her least deviation from routine bore a far-reaching effect upon people whom she did not even know. Here that craving for perfection which she had hoped to satisfy with Kane found, in one stroke, both expression and fulfillment. For here broken bodies were restored, here broken souls were strengthened. Here the imperfect was given an impetus toward perfection.

Not much scrubbing had been required of Nina during the trial months. There were ward attendants for that, but she had had to do enough of it to learn the method. Now, as always, when she scrubbed away at a spot, she seemed to be cleansing the memory of that last picture of Kane. Always she seemed to be drawing out of her body, out of her limbs, out of her aching knees and strained back and numb arms the physical memory of surrender. And now she scrubbed away at the dark stain, wedging

the bristles into the cracks of the old floor, effacing the stains of that which to her had seemed unclean.

All that afternoon Nina wondered what she should do in the event of dismissal. She could not return to the Holzmanns'. They had been very generous in inviting her to stay with them those few weeks before the new classes formed at the hospital. The doctor had used his influence toward the acceptance of Nina's application, for all vacancies had already been filled. Obviously she could not ask Antonio Calucci for shelter. He was unmarried. She would be ashamed to go to Uncle Thomas. He was too much the pedagogue to take sides against discipline. Moreover, she had no idea where he lived; since her separation she had met him at his request, but they had sat talking in one of his clubs, and he dropped no hint of his address.

When she thought of Jude, it was with curious apathy, and to remark again on the gentle obstinacy of a certain phrase of his letter, the only communication from him since the night of the fête. "Of course, I do not want to influence you to return. When you have come to some decision of your own free will — "; " — any time you care to. I suppose you still have the keys." She could not imagine herself going back to *that* house.

Then there was Julia. Julia had made it plain very soon that she could not accommodate her daughter in her apartment. She was sharing it with a friend, and the terms of partnership did not include daughters or other dependents. Besides, Julia was impatient with Nina for the step she had taken.

"You weren't happy under similar conditions," she told her mother.

Julia's eyes flashed scorn. "There was no companion for me. But for you — wealth and ease. You young folks make me tired. You don't know when you have a good thing. If I stuck out what I did, you could have done it, too."

Besides, Nina would not care to go to her mother. A great deal of her childish loyalty had been destroyed since the affair with Bingle. After seeing a woman die of an overdose of laudanum, and watching the orderlies march an addict up and down the courtyard for six hours to walk off the effects of heroin, she became truly horrified at Julia's part in any such tragedy.

The last service Nina performed that afternoon was to shake up some forty pillows on twenty-four beds in the Female Emergency Ward. The little faded doll of a woman nearest the door told Nina again, as she had done every day for three weeks, how much nicer it was to "lie on a pillow you shake up. You shake them up right."

Promptly at six o'clock, Nina reported at Mrs. Dunn's office.

XXIV

Mrs. Dunn willed Nina to advance to a certain spot before her desk. In describing it to the girls later, she used that expression. Mrs. Dunn did not speak. She merely exercised her will, and Nina felt she was expected to stand on that particular spot to receive sentence.

Mrs. Dunn's emotions had long since been sterilized under pressure, as were the glittering instruments in the case behind her, and like those instruments they were shut away under hardy plate glass, for all to look at but none to touch. Above her head, in the exact center of the wall, hung her diploma, framed. On the right, in the exact center of the wall, hung a picture of Florence Nightingale. On the left, in the exact center of the wall, hung a picture of the latest class to be graduated. All else was blinding whiteness.

First Mrs. Dunn recited to Nina the clause in the rules which forbade social intercourse between the nurses and student nurses on the one hand, and internes, medical students and the visiting staff on the other. Then she recited the clause which empowered the Board of Directors to dismiss any student at any time in her course if she was deemed undesirable by the Superintendent of Nurses. The ice of Mrs. Dunn's voice melted off in rhythmic drops.

"Rules such as these are made for the purpose of maintaining the professional dignity, and insuring the maxi-

mum service for the patient. Nurses interested in unprofessional conversations with their medical superiors invariably neglect those duties which they have promised to fulfill. The student must realize that laws are supported by the experience and wisdom of those who have made them."

Nina twisted her fingers convulsively. Looking beyond Mrs. Dunn, through the window, she got a full view of the hospital entrance with its old stone portico, of the entrance to the nurses' dormitory on the opposite street, of the tennis courts where four internes were playing. Another window fronted on the central courtyard about which were grouped the hospital buildings. Thus Mrs. Dunn kept her watch on the activities of the hospital as well as on the ambulance runway, on the garage, on the laboratory, the morgue, Isolation, the mechanic's shop and the rear emergency entrance. The woman was only a disembodied voice to Nina, and the voice dripped on.

"I have here before me a statement from each of your instructors." Mrs. Dunn lifted a card from her table but she did not read from it. She recited the report by rote: "Principles of Nursing — excellent. History of Nursing — excellent. Ethics of Nursing — excellent. Bacteriology — excellent. Hospital Housekeeping — excellent." A half dozen others testified to excellence. It was against Mrs. Dunn's sense of fitness to acquaint a pupil with her record before the end of the term, but she wished Miss Wyndram to see the workings of mercy and justice.

"I cannot afford to ignore a record like this," she went on. "You are the type of material we need, provided you master your own personal desires. There is another matter to be mentioned. It has been called to my notice that you are on terms of unprofessional friendliness with

Doctor Holzmann, the visiting gastro-enterologist. You have been seen stepping into his car and driving off with him. You are reported to have entered into personal conversation with him on a number of occasions. I have no official record of this. My information is unofficial but correct."

Nina's surprise could in no way be interpreted as impudence, or insubordination. "Why, Mrs. Dunn," she said. "Doctor Holzmann was my father's friend. He's known me since I was a little girl. It was on his suggestion that I came here."

"A hospital is an institution for the care of the sick, and not for the furtherance of old friendships. The rule is plain, Miss Wyndram, and for the good of the profession it must be observed."

For punishment, Nina was put on probation again. Every day the head nurse of the ward where she was on duty would have to sign a card attesting to her perfect behavior, the card to be dropped into the box outside Mrs. Dunn's door.

Nina was never more grateful for her private room than on that evening. She hurried across the street to the dormitory, and entered by the side door to avoid meeting any of the girls bound for supper. She did not intend to go to the dining room. Despite her indifference to such matters in high school, she felt mortified at her transgression. She made her meal on crackers, and a cup of tea which she brewed in the kitchenette at the end of the hall.

Chiefly because she did not want to exchange confidences, Nina had not fraternized with the girls. She had no desire to have it known that she was the wife of Doctor Judson Penning, nor even that she was married. Her

classmates were helter-skelter young folk, like young folk the world over, with no troubles but immediate ones, and no dark, hollow pits to forget. She knew they considered her a snob, yet she did her best to meet them part of the way. She lent them her clothes, especially the evening wraps and gowns, for special occasions. When she found that they were not offended, she gave them many of the trinkets Jude had packed in the trunk. What distance this generosity diminished was again created by her superior progress in the work. The girls resented her excellence. Now sweeping aside all barriers in the common cause against authority, they piled into her room at eight o'clock to hear the verdict. Suddenly Nina had become their champion. Since they had expected her to be dismissed, they concluded that she must have argued a good case to have effected a pardon.

"Mrs. Dunn," said Betsy Rogers, Nina's next-door neighbor, "ought to be a matron in a public comfort station."

Two seniors from the floor below came up to see what the merriment was about. With the last word said about the common enemy, they stayed to chat of other things — the newest fox trot, the injustice of the rule Nina had violated, the physiognomy of the three new internes, the possibility of an eight-hour day, the mystery surrounding the case in private room Number 10, the poor kid abandoned by her parents in the Children's Ward, the General Superintendent's wife's new hat.

Betsy, busy rummaging in Nina's closet for some clothes to wear for her date the next night, was not quite satisfied. "Say, Nina," she said archly, "did Dunn say anything to you about Doctor Holzmann?"

An expectant hush settled over the room. Nina, looking about, realized that the girls must not only have known of her connection with him, but have speculated on it.

"How do you all know we're friendly?" Nina wondered.

"Just try to keep anything secret in a hospital," retorted Betsy, holding up for inspection the last dress Nina had had made — the sapphire chiffon.

Later somebody produced a huge box of candy, the gift of a "G.P." Fifteen cents was collected from each person present, and two of the girls went over to Third Avenue to buy pastry and cream for coffee. Then they crowded into the kitchenette and continued festivities.

Irresponsible all her life, Nina had now lost the faculty of laughing without especial provocation, of lounging with complete abandonment, of shutting the day's events from the evening's consciousness. That morning on which she knew it would mean death to her spirit to abide by her choice of Kane, responsibility had come to Nina in a flash. She had not yet adjusted herself to its demands. But in losing her capacity for spontaneous gayety, Nina had nevertheless regained that freshness and charm which had first attracted Jude, that glisten of growing things which had been masked by jealousy those last few months of her life with her husband. It was as if she had contracted that disease of bitterness by infection from her mother, and the disease, having run its course, had immunized her against future attacks.

No more than the tree in February knows the secret of its growth, did Nina know the secret of hers. She realized only its effect in the ambition to serve by nursing. Nina had had no great nor even childish ambition in her life,

and the comfort of a directing purpose inspired her with courage.

Not incorrectly, she anticipated some trouble with Dion O'Connor, but trusted to this new sophistication to keep him at a proper distance. Either the men would not or could not understand that Nina, at least, preferred to be snubbed rather than to be drawn involuntarily into danger. It took her several months, following this incident, to force this nurses' idol to the point where he could pass her with a brief nod. He was forever pouncing out on her from unexpected turns, cornering her in linen closets, taking her heavy food buses out of her hands. Uncomfortable under the envious glances which followed her, Nina often reflected on the perversity of life. Many another student nurse would willingly have risked expulsion in return for Dion O'Connor's attentions. To Nina, they were a source of irritation. Spies and gossips were numerous about the hospital, and Nina awaited, with daily dread, the summons from Mrs. Dunn, but through some chance the superintendent either was not informed of the matter, or for private reasons preferred to overlook it.

Although Nina had known from the start that her first encounter with Dion would cost her first-year honors, when, at the end of the term, she actually saw another mount the platform to receive the gold medal for general excellence, she choked back tears of chagrin. It was September. Nina had now seen twelve months of service and was entitled to two weeks' vacation before entering upon the duties of the intermediate term. What money she had, she was loath to spend and so she passed the time in the city, taking her meals and sleeping at the dormitory, as she was permitted to do.

For two weeks Nina went out into the world, visited the museums once more, spent a day in the Zoölogical Gardens, one in the Aquarium, one in the Public Library. She went to a play, a concert, a widely advertised motion picture. She roamed into nooks and corners of the hospital, made friends with an old woman in the sewing room and with an old Swiss mechanic in the carpenter shop. The old woman smoked a pipe and Nina bought her a pound of tobacco. The Swiss peasant carved for her a wooden elephant with its trunk in segments, which she promptly gave to a child in the surgical ward.

With great zest, Nina entered her second year. She began with duty in Isolation, the task which the girls feared and hated most. This was part of the practical work in the nursing of communicable diseases, and each student had to have at least a week of this service to her credit. The necessary training in twenty-four-hour duty was usually combined with Isolation practice. During that week Nina was to be virtually a prisoner. She must not pass through the hospital proper, or mingle with other nurses or leave Isolation except for a walk in the courtyard. She had to snatch her sleep whenever she could, and her food and the patient's requirements were handed in to her through the grilled door.

The stone building wedged in between garage and the morgue had exercised a fascination for Nina from the start. She had been through the rooms once when the place was empty, and the detached, white-tiled cubicles seemed attractive. There were seldom more than three patients in Isolation, for the majority of cases were transferred to the city hospitals for communicable diseases. Nina found one patient, a young woman her own age, with spinal meningitis.

Now that Nina had scrubbed the tiled walls twice daily for three days, now that she had eaten nine solitary meals, spent three restless nights waiting for the call of a speechless, paralyzed patient, heard the sound of her own voice only when she answered the inquiries of the house physician and the head nurse technically in charge of Isolation, she began to count the hours until her release. No spot in the whole hospital was sadder than these cement halls at night. Dim lights casting terrible shadows would have been preferable to the white dazzle which left no corner unilluminated. When Nina arrived at the point where she wished another patient would be sent over to relieve the monotony, she thought it high time to step downstairs for a breath of air. There were no rooms on the street level. The entrance led directly to the second story.

Just as Nina reached the doorway, she heard an ambulance whirring up the runway. Instantly the strong headlights caught her in their glare, but instead of turning to the right toward the emergency door, with bell clanging to summon an orderly, the bus kept straight ahead, and stopped at the morgue door not ten feet away from Nina. The deviation meant but one thing, that a patient had died en route to the hospital.

"Damn that woman!" came a voice through the darkness, which Nina recognized as that of Martin Jackson, an interne.

It struck Nina then that she could carry no disease to the dead. It was three hours since she had touched her patient. She had changed her clothes since then and disinfected her hands. Any interruption was welcome. She walked over to the bus.

None of the men noticed her at first. The driver, and a policeman who had apparently accompanied the ambulance, had already tilted the stretcher out at the rear. None of the men seemed to notice Nina. She drew closer and bent over the dead woman. Under a dirty nightgown that clung tenaciously to her body the woman's swollen configuration was clearly visible. Her skin was soggy, her cheeks bloated. Her lips, slightly parted in the relaxation of death, were outlined in blue, the purplish-blue consequent to the inhalation of illuminating gas.

Nina straightened.

"Where'd you come from?" questioned the doctor crossly.

"Isolation," Nina answered. "Is it a suicide?"

"I suppose so. Damn that woman! The gas company was there when I arrived. Pulmotor brought her around, but I had to bring her back under arrest. The fool turned up her toes just as the bus got started."

The policeman, making entries in a small, black notebook, grinned his assent.

"You'll be fined," Nina said.

"Yeah. Half my salary," grumbled Doctor Jackson. Once a week, he and his fiancée permitted themselves the luxury of a concert. But an interne's salary is hardly elastic enough to include both a fine imposed upon him for bringing in a dead patient and the price of a pair of tickets.

Nina, knowing the cause of his temper, felt enormously provoked. She had not yet learned to wear her reactions at the professional angle.

"Where's Bennet?" bellowed Mike, the bus driver. Bennet was the morgue keeper.

"Gone to visit his married daughter," Nina said, swallowing hard. "It's his night off."

Mike swore. "All hands on deck, gentlemen."

Nina followed the stretcher. It seemed an outrage that these three men should be the pallbearers, one of them furious at the woman for interference with his life, another an officer of the law under whose jurisdiction she would have fallen had she lived, the third sullen because he had to do another's work.

"There she goes, boys. Shove her in. Watch out for the pig-tail."

The policeman, kind enough to share Mike's duty, wrote her name with a flourish on the tag, rubbed his hands energetically and bade them a cheerful good night. Mike lifted the heavy zinc cover into place, tucked in Tillie Savitch's braid of thick black hair, then thumped on the cover to test its stability.

"'Night, Doc. Guess she's safe."

"Good night."

"Good night, Mike."

Doctor Jackson turned to Nina. "There's no sense in hanging around here. Good night."

Their voices reverberated down the corridor, rebounded from the closed metal doors leading into the laboratory, circled the autopsy theater at the other end of the passage and returned to where she stood. Side by side, bottom to top, the niches of the dead were embedded in the cement wall, four rows, five in a row, like pigeonholes in a gigantic desk. Sometimes, when all were closed, they bore a closer resemblance to shoe boxes on the shelves of a shop, each front bearing black figuring for identification.

Nina shivered and hugged herself tightly. It was cold.

XXV

A WHITE light spread over the courtyard. Nina located it in the operating room of Maternity. A death, a birth. One suicide. One fighting for life. Somewhere a man whistled. Perhaps Mike in the garage. The far-off rattle of dishes in the kitchen emphasized her isolation. They must be preparing the meal for the night staff.

All at once the muteness of the morgue enticed Nina. A gust of September wind whirled through the open door, twisting and turning the tags of identification. Who were the silent creatures awaiting their families? There had been an autopsy on a woman that morning. Nina had seen the class in anatomy file in at the side door. She recalled the story. Bennet, the morgue keeper, stopping under her window in Isolation to tell her that he was going to visit his grandchildren, had added this bit of gossip about the dead.

Within a short time after this woman's death from unknown cause (hence the autopsy) two men had presented themselves at the office, each with a marriage certificate and photographs, each claiming to be her husband. She had entered under a third name. Would the third man assert his rights in the morning? Had there really been a third man, or was it an assumed name?

Nina knew a sudden impulse to look upon the face of this woman. She turned down the corridor and hurried into the autopsy theater. She felt for the switch button just inside the door. Eight tiers of benches were arranged

in a semicircle about the slate table. On it lay the woman who had been wanted by two men. A rubber sheet covered all but her head and the right arm which dangled limply over the edge. Through the drain pipe in the center of the table water dripped incessantly. Nina found herself crossing the room to the steady rhythm of it. *One* — two — three — four. *Drip* — drip — drip — drip. *Drip* — drip — drip — drip.

She was not afraid of the woman with the two husbands. Some facetious nurse, wearying of the endless one-inch bandage and a square knot, had tied the heavy jaws with a three-inch bandage and secured the band by a flippant bow over the left ear. Contrary to rules, a pair of imitation jade ear ornaments, and a ring to match had been left on the body. In this hard, red, coarse face was no message for Nina. She had nothing in common with a woman decked in cheap jewelry, even in death.

Quite abruptly Nina's blood froze. She felt that she was not alone in that building. *One* — two — three — four. *Drip* — drip — drip — drip. Only the water. Yet she knew she was not alone. The dead were — dead. But she knew she was not alone, and hard upon her conviction came the sound of footsteps in the corridor, of short, labored breathing, of heavy bodies moving closer.

The pounding of Nina's heart almost choked her. Where could she hide? Was there an alarm to be sounded? Perhaps they were not intruders. After all, they might be internes, or the coroner and a hospital official. Why had she left the door open? Undertakers? Or the Night Superintendent looking for her? In panic, Nina crouched behind one of the benches. From this position she saw the feet of the intruders halt in the doorway. Men's voices:

"She's mine. I'm telling yuh!"

"The devil she is."

"We'll see."

With ghastly unconcern the two men leaned over the table. Nina could not see their faces. Their necks were thick and dirty. The first spoke again, and his tongue bunched and stumbled.

"All dressed up, ain't yuh, darlin'? All dressed up and waitin' fur me, eh?" Thick though his voice was, Nina fancied it boasted a tinge of triumph.

The other's head rolled unsteadily. "I got picture," he mumbled. "Pictures 'n' everything. You ain't gonna get 'er. Say — I tell yuh what — "

Some sign must have passed between the sotted figures. In a trice they were kneeling. The table cut them from Nina's view. The rattle of small objects, perhaps buttons or stones, rose sharply above the wheezing. Buttons or stones? Curiosity had displaced Nina's terror. This might be a matter to be reported to Mrs. Dunn. She lifted her head above the back of the bench. Then she shifted a little closer.

Drip — drip — drip — drip. *One* — two — three — four. Under the pendent hand of the woman, the two men were shooting dice. Over and over again the cubes bounded against the floor with the sharp, rapid intensity of hailstones. Now one man leered with approaching victory. Now the other snatched it from his grasp. Oaths filled the gaps. Nina forgot the passing of time. No sounds of outside activity penetrated here.

The ring of metal started the gamblers. They looked around, fortunately not in Nina's direction. The imitation jade ring had dropped from the woman's fingers.

"You talkin', babe?" cried the loquacious one, laughing raucously at his own humor. He gave the lifeless hand a generous squeeze. Once more the two heads swayed toward each other. With greater desperation, the game was resumed.

It struck Nina that the joy of the winner would be an unholy sight. She could not bear to stay. And then there was her patient, her duty. What if she had been called on the telephone during her absence?

Slowly, cautiously, a half-foot at a time, she crept toward the doorway. In their absorption, the men failed to notice her. She half expected to encounter daylight, but not as much time had been lost as she imagined. Crystal-faceted stars beaded the sky. The artificial quiet of a hospital at night was to her, as always, strangely portentous. Nina discovered she had been gone only half an hour. Her patient had not moved an inch since her departure. Flushed, rigid, the girl lay in a stupor which was neither death nor life. Nina took her pulse, temperature, respiration, and sponged the girl, performing these offices slowly, to consume as much time as possible. She inspected the supply of meningococcus vaccine, against the hour when the house doctor of the night should come to make the injection. Once she had made a few entries on the chart, washed her hands, slept a bit, the time for his visit would be upon her. Usually he came at four o'clock. Then she would sleep again until breakfast was wheeled over.

But Nina could not so much as close her eyes. Within a half hour, she had seen one unwanted woman and one desired by too many; one who had solved her own problem, one who was having her problem solved. The sight haunted her into wakefulness.

For the rest of that week, Nina had much to think about, though little to do. There was one other interruption in the form of a boy with measles, but he was kept in Isolation just long enough for the hospital to collect the allotted fee from the city for his care. He cried when he left Nina. They had had a few jolly hours together, and he promised to write to her the instant he was discharged from the new hospital, and come to see her too.

The second half of Nina's week seemed longer than the first. Many times during the day she held her wrist watch to her ear and shook it, to make sure that the works had not stopped. A minute was not sixty seconds all over the world. In Isolation there were three thousand seconds to a minute, and when at last, at noon of the seventh day, she sighted the relief party, she wondered what to do with her new-found freedom.

For about an hour, Nina felt dazed by the normal activity outside. Familiar objects appeared strange, and the customary silence of the main building seemed positively noisy. One of the first things she did, after dressing for the street, was to talk to one of the office clerks about the woman whose strange funeral ceremony she had witnessed. The clerk, a young girl to whom the words "ancient history" meant events two days old, frowned at Nina as if she had spoken another language. Nina mentioned the facts of the case.

"Oh, yeah, now I know," replied the girl. "You got a good memory, I must say. How should I remember? Relative of yours?"

"No, but I was interested in the case."

"I can look it up." She began to turn the pages of a large ledger, wetting her forefinger anew for each page.

"Here it is. Oh — one of the swains backed out. Guess he didn't want to stand the expense. Funerals come high these days."

Doctor Jackson, hanging around the telephone switchboard, waylaid Nina. "You were around that night I brought in a suicide, weren't you? Just read this."

With no attempts to conceal a flourish, he handed her a newspaper clipping from the local home news. Nina stiffened while she read the blubbering story of how the noble Doctor Jackson fought untiringly, unceasingly, uninterruptedly, not to mention skillfully, for the life of an overburdened citizen of the great metropolis. The gas company's pulmotor received no mention at all.

Nina's sarcasm was deliberate. "That's worth half your salary, isn't it?"

"It certainly is!" he swaggered.

"It all helps when a fellow's engaged," put in the telephone operator.

The girls laughed at Nina's story of the game of chance in the morgue. They agreed that Isolation duty was enough to make anybody see spooks.

"But it's true," she protested.

They called her Joan of Arc and knew she was only trying to scare those who had not yet "served time."

That week, with its accompanying extracurricular sights, added to Nina's experience something which this duty was designed to give to the young nurse, but which few of the girls learned. She came away with the sense of what service in remote places might mean, of what sacrifices one might be called upon to make in far corners or near, of what calls the profession might make on one's self-assurance and courage.

XXVI

Jude was himself amazed that he should search for pretexts to visit Kane. There had been no such need before. Their desire to see each other had been reason enough. Nina's unaccountable desertion seemed to have created this necessity, which taunted him because he realized it might exist only in his perturbed emotions. Any such sham in his feeling for Kane meant a lack of faith, and Jude was at a loss to account rationally for his suspicions.

Perhaps Kane's disappearance on the very day of Nina's had something to do with his feeling about his friend. However, his name had been included in the list of those sailing to New Orleans that same afternoon.

Jude wondered whether he was coupling events which bore no relationship. After all, he did not know just when Nina had run away, since until he returned from his hospital rounds he had believed her to be sleeping off her tantrum in the guest room. She might have left the house before dawn, or some time during the morning, while Mrs. Kent went out marketing. Later, he discovered that Kane's sailing and Nina's arrival at the Holzmanns' were simultaneous — provided he could believe Julia, his informer.

Conscious of not handling the problem as he did his professional ones, Jude tried to persuade himself that it did not matter where she went after leaving her home, or whether Kane was directly or indirectly responsible. Still,

her power of delusion worried him. She could find beauty where none existed. He recalled how he had been pleased by her appreciation of Kane, by her consideration for him, by her capacity to understand those concealed traits which had made Kane his friend. They had always seemed at ease in each other's company. They had gone to places together. Kane had escorted her home from Aunt Edith's fête, and perhaps comforted her. The thought of a physical attraction between them tortured his flesh and his brain.

He would not settle that doubt until he could study Kane's face, but for six months after the sailing Kane was not to be found. Whenever Jude began to think oddly of his friend's absence, he reassured himself by the other's past performances. Kane frequently dropped out of New York for a period, only to reappear when he was given up as lost. And so, at intervals of a week or ten days during these six months, Jude had called at his friend's apartment under some pretext or other, finding always that he might have employed the same excuse.

The landlady had one answer to his inquiries. "I get my rent just the same and don't answer no questions. Only there ain't no garbage on the dumbwaiter from his flat, so I guess he ain't here." The rent came in check form mailed from "some city down south."

Had Jude's first or even fifth quest been successful, his doubts might long since have vaporized, but Kane's stubborn silence aggravated the craving for denial; and when they finally met, shortly after a half year had passed, Jude had to fight against self-betrayal. In Kane's greeting he fancied a triumphant scorn, a secret superiority. But of course Kane might be scornful for any reason or

no reason, or because he was heart high at seeing his friend and thought he ought to mask his delight.

"Been back long?" was Jude's greeting.

"Almost two weeks."

"Why didn't you call me?"

Kane shrugged his left shoulder in answer.

Jude glanced about the kitchen where they sat, taking inventory at the same time of the objects on the dresser visible through the doorway. He knew Nina had once given Kane a photograph of herself. It was nowhere in sight.

"Things kept the same while you were gone," Jude remarked.

"Yes," said the other.

"Stay in N'Orleans all the time?"

"N-no — went about here and there."

"See any of the old places?"

"No."

"Do any work?"

"Prepared some preliminary notes on sex determination."

"Ready for publication?"

"Not quite."

"I'd like to have a look at them," said Jude.

"Haven't taken them out of my suit case."

Rain began to patter on the roof. Kane waddled around, closing windows. Jude thought the little man's legs seemed shorter, clumsier, and his feet flatter. He cudgeled his brains for another topic of conversation and was alarmed that he should lack for subjects to discuss with his friend. This was not the usual tenor of their talk. They did not habitually chide each other for lack of these

silly attentions on which superficial friendships feed. Nor were they accustomed to waste time on generalities, on places visited and persons seen. By forcing that other important topic out of his speech, Jude merely directed it into the very center of his consciousness. Unless he shook himself from the mood, he would court the other suspicions.

Kane may already have detected a change in his friend. He, too, seemed to hedge and parry, and was decidedly hostile to Jude's questions. He, too, seemed to be evading a pertinent topic. Kane returned with a few shirts and a sewing box and began to replace buttons. He made no attempt at conversation. Did he know that Nina was gone, Jude wondered. Or perhaps he did, and was unwilling to open the subject after all these months. And yet delicacy of this nature was not quite in Kane's character. On the other hand, Jude did not trust himself to introduce his wife's name.

He said, "Why do you waste your time sewing on buttons? You can get a woman to come in an hour a day and do that for you."

Kane shot the other an oblique, almost leering look. "I prefer to be independent of women."

Distinctly Jude caught the emphasis on the first person pronoun. Then Kane knew about Nina, and knowing, derided him for his failure. Thoughtfully, Jude pulled on an empty pipe. He had left his tobacco pouch somewhere, and Kane did not smoke. Both men fell into proud silence, and when that silence became discordant, Jude spoke first.

"This is why I dropped in, Kane. Last week I heard rumors about a man admitted to the institute, claiming that

the first blood transfusion ever performed was done on him. Do you know anything about it?"

"I heard them talk."

"Is the fellow here yet?"

"If he's not in the psychopathic ward."

"Oh! Was it that sort of testimony?"

With something like viciousness, Kane bit off a length of cotton. "Wait a moment," he said while threading the needle. "I did hear more about it. I think one of the younger internes in the reception building looked up the *Lancet* for that date."

"Did the man furnish facts?"

"I recall the story now," Kane said. "He's an old Scotch seaman. To the interne taking his history he said that he had had a transfusion from his mother when he was a small boy. According to his age and current records of the first transfusion, that was impossible. When contradicted, he insisted that it had been reported in the *Lancet* at that time and he mentioned the date. He even boasted with a touch of braggadocio that it was the first one ever performed. That's why they planned to recommend him for observation. It sounded like a delusion."

"What was the date?"

"I forget. Some time in the seventies."

"The seventies?" echoed Jude in surprise.

"And the place was Edinburgh or Glasgow. You see, I didn't make note of the details. I hadn't thought of your possibly wanting them."

"I suppose I can get the accurate information."

"Yes — call up Goldstein. G. B. Goldstein. His curiosity was finally aroused; he hunted up the old *Lancet* files and there was an inconspicuous report of the matter."

"I wonder if the method was described."

"I think so."

"I'd like to talk to the old sea dog myself." Jude had no intention of being swallowed by that silence again. "Well — " he remarked. "I've got office hours soon." And he rose to go.

Kane accompanied him to the door. His next question struck out of ambush at Jude. "Do you know anything about Nina?"

He had wanted to talk of her, but now that Kane opened the subject, reticence overcame the desire. Kane would never understand about a man's wife.

"Do you know anything about Nina?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. Yes."

"Getting a divorce?" Kane was snapping the patent lock on the door back and forth.

"I have no cause," he said slowly, watching the other with eyes that bored. There was not a flicker of any definite emotion on Kane's face. He continued to toy with the lock.

"Does Nina want it?"

"She hasn't said so."

As he hurried through the rain toward a telephone booth to call up this G. B. Goldstein, the doctor felt weighted by a final sense of defeat. He had not fathomed the mystery which he had come to solve. He had permitted Kane to befuddle him, and Kane, forewarned, would never draw closer to betraying himself than he had done to-day.

In the Penning family there was a traditional attitude toward the death of a loved one, a kind of haughty resignation in a matter where neither will power nor human

interference prevailed. During the six months which was completely closed by this visit to Kane, Jude had felt bewildered, puzzled and not a little irritated at Nina's behavior. Because he had not seen her slip away, he could scarcely believe it. Often he returned with the firm belief that he would find her coat slung over the banister, or a stray glove on the stairs. He had seen her vanish into the guest room. He would not have been surprised had she reappeared from that point. Between that time and the week Nina entered her second year, her husband had adopted in the whole affair that haughty resignation — as toward the death of a loved one.

XXVII

The girls at the hospital complained bitterly that the endless routine made of each day an individual eternity. For Nina, on whose time there had been few demands, this very round of duties caused the weeks to fly with unbelievable rapidity. Before she accomplished half her intention, or so it seemed, the supper or the breakfast trays were on hand to be distributed again, which two points marked the turning of a nurse's day. Nina no longer counted time in terms of days or weeks, or even months, but in seasons. Such and such had happened last spring, or two summers ago; or next winter she might do so and so. After long intervals, small incidents seemed to have occurred only a short time before. A variation of routine, however slight, offered food for thought until the next diversion.

Accordingly the others fought frantically to keep up with the current of life outside, to learn the new dance steps, to sing the new songs, to mouth the new catchwords, to tell the new jokes. Nina, on the contrary, chose to detach herself from all those affairs of the moment. She wanted to steep herself in her new life. Again the tentacles of her being reached out and drew back into her substance of life, food for that girlhood hunger which had never been properly fed. And when she spent an evening reading beyond the lesson assigned, studying beyond the point required for the State Board examinations, and searching for answers to questions her fellow students never dreamed

of asking, she felt overwhelming humility toward her work. Such had been her father's attitude and her husband's. At such times, too, Nina's eyes glowed with a dark somber flame. The spark of Mark Wyndram's soul had found tinder in his daughter's eyes.

With the entire staff, Nina shared a sentiment against visiting days. They meant confusion and noise, and tried one's patience to the breaking point. Swarms of people filled the main hall, and each visitor believed his inquiry to be of more importance than his neighbor's. Despite the additional numbers of nurses and orderlies on duty to give directions, groups were constantly losing their way. Children had to be kept from the wards. No gifts of food were permitted for patients. Only two visitors at a time might sit at one bed, and the nurse must at least attempt to preserve quiet and protect her patient.

In the wake of visiting days came harder work. Adult patients were fretful with excitement. The children cried pitifully for Mother or Daddy or Sister, who had just left. Concealed sweets had to be confiscated from diabetics; and heavy, pasty dumplings from men with gastric disturbances; pickles from convalescing young mothers; and lollypops from babies. With all the vigilance, families were adept at smuggling in food. In enlisting the sympathy of their visitors, patients made complaints against the treatment they received. Visitors lost no time in relaying these complaints to Mrs. Dunn, the doctors, or the head clerk. Though some of them were obviously idle, many bore investigation. Often, after visiting day, patients confronted with charges recently made against the nurses flatly denied their connection with any such calumny. But it caused heartache, trouble, argument, and the staff drew breath,

rested its weary feet and dreaded the next "At Home."

On one such day in the spring of the intermediate term, Nina met an old friend, Mrs. de Silvio, the colored woman from Doctor Slater's laboratory. Nina was at the door as a sort of special policeman to keep the entrance clear. For this public position girls were chosen who would add the proper note of dignity, and very frequently of late, Nina had been assigned to the spot. Spick-and-spandy in blue-and-white striped uniform, white apron, and white student's cap resting lightly on the golden fleece of hair, she might have served as an illustration for the school catalogue.

"Excuse me, Nurse," said the woman. "Can you tell me how I get to the laboratory?"

Nina looked into the brown face, wrinkled like a shelled walnut. "Mrs. de Silvio!"

The other squinted, studying Nina. Then her mouth broadened to a grin. "Why, Miss Wyndram! Who'd think to find you here? And it's not Miss Wyndram no more, neither. It's Mrs. — "

Frightened, Nina broke in. "Of course it's Miss Wyndram. Have you got somebody here in the hospital?"

"Not me. Doctor Slater sent me for sheep cells for them Wassermans. Couldn't get 'em this morning down to the slaughterhouse. So he fixed it to borrow some here. But that's funny. Only this morning the doctor was in, and I asked how was his wife, meaning you — "

"Say," bawled a man's voice behind her, "I was here before that nigger. Where's Ward Ten?"

A woman on a bench chimed in. "Nobody cares when you come. They leave you sit here as long as they want to. All they do is flirt with the doctors."

Nina bit her lips and gave the necessary directions. Not an interne was in sight on the main floor, but Nina would not have been astonished had a complaint been registered again her for this fancied offense. She turned back to Mrs. de Silvio.

"I'd love to talk to you," she said. "But I'm dreadfully busy."

"There's a lot happened since you was with us. Let me see, it's more'n a year — "

"It's two and a half years, Mrs. de Silvio."

"Well — now! When you're old, time ain't so long. Two and a half years since you was with us!"

At Nina's invitation, Mrs. de Silvio visited her at the dormitory that night. Nina was delayed in getting downstairs, and when she entered the reception room, she found the old Negress the center of a group of girls who were egging her on to tell jokes and animal stories. She had lost no time in describing to them her erstwhile profession of animal tamer and, except for their burst of cruel, incredulous laughter, Nina would not have cared that they appropriated her guest. Her little black bonnet trimmed with violets and lilies-of-the-valley was tied under the chin with a rusty black bow. The girls went into fits of glee over her black taffeta coat with bell sleeves, and Nina was glad that Mrs. de Silvio was unaware of their discourtesy, which stiffened her own sensibilities.

She joined the group. "This is Mrs. de Silvio, girls," she said.

Betsy Rogers answered. "As if we didn't hear. We know all about her, and all about you, and all about everything."

Nina stared fixedly into Betsy's saucy, sarcastic blue

eyes. Was that only a thoughtless phrase, "We know all about you?" It seemed highly probable now that Mrs. de Silvio had chattered. She had been foolish to have her come to the hospital.

"What is there to know about me?" she challenged.

"You'd be surprised," mocked Betsy, but Nina was none the wiser. Betsy might pretend to be informed merely to trap Nina into an admission. It was her idea of humor.

The girls drifted away. Mrs. de Silvio began her reminiscences: Rudy, the zoo boy, was married. The walls of the third story had been removed to make one large room. They did say Doctor Slater was going to get a manager so he might devote himself to research. Did the new centrifuge arrive after Nina's marriage or before? Mrs. de Silvio could see Nina didn't want them to know she was Doctor Penning's wife. She could see that. She didn't have to be told a thing twice. And that was her business, if Miss Wyndram didn't want nobody to know —

Nina did not care to ask Mrs. de Silvio outright, but she wondered what Jude had answered that morning to the old woman's inquiry about his wife. Even though she knew he was not one to confide in bottle-washers and laboratory technicians, she thought it hardly possible that her separation from her husband was not common talk among the people of their acquaintance.

During the succeeding months, many stray words said to her indicated that some gossip was afoot. At least, there existed suspicions that she was highly connected in medical circles as well as social. Whether Mrs. de Silvio had betrayed her, or Mrs. Holzmann, who frequently came to the hospital with the doctor to wait while he made his rounds, she was not entirely certain. On the other hand,

some officer of the Ladies' Auxiliary or of the Christmas committees might have recognized her as some one they had seen somewhere — at the Pennings', at the Griswolds', at the Bells'.

In June, Nina took the prize in operating-room technique. Doctor Philip Drake, one of the honorary directors, was scheduled to make the awards. Nina dreaded that moment when she would have to mount the platform and face him. He had met her too often to be deceived as to her identity. But at the last moment he telephoned his regrets and Nina almost cried with relief. All that day she thought of her father, who was dead. Her mother, who was alive, had not time to come to see Nina receive a twenty-dollar gold piece and a medal, especially since she didn't approve of the whole affair.

Nina had been hearing of Jude through various channels, principally through Doctor Calucci. Independent of her, a friendship had developed between the Latin and his late friend's son-in-law, and Calucci missed no opportunity to mention "Doctore Penning" upon those occasions when Nina came to sip red wine and "Eat, *bambina,* eat." He was so sly and comical about it that she could not reprove him. She merely hoped that he did not mention her to Jude, who now seemed to occupy in the affectionate Calucci's life that niche left void by the death of Mark Wyndram. At first, she had expected her friends to disinherit her husband out of loyalty to her. She resented the hold he had taken upon them in so short a time. Now, with a reaction not unlike cold approval, she learned from Calucci's hints much of Jude's progress and his growing popularity in the profession.

Midsummer brought a bit of impersonal news of him,

news which impressed upon Nina the inevitability of a chance meeting with him at some time, almost any day. A notice appeared on the bulletin board in the reception room that a transfusion was to be performed the next day, and that all undergraduates who had not witnessed this type of operation would be relieved of other duty to watch it, if they so desired. A transfusion was not an everyday occurrence in a hospital. Several of the girls were all for taking advantage of the offer, not so much in the interests of science as to crayfish out of an hour's work. Nina had seen one a few weeks after she entered the hospital, and knew something about the process from hearing Jude talk. She was to have the next afternoon off, and thought she might watch, provided the hour did not interfere with her appointment with the Mother Superior of an order of nursing sisters in the city.

"What time is it going to be?" she asked.

"Whenever they can get Dion O'Connor," remarked Betsy dryly.

"What has he to do with it?"

"He's 'type three' blood. And so is the man. They're hard to find. Prince Dion always plays the hero when they need 'type three.'"

"I don't see anything to be sarcastic over. I think it's courageous."

"Oh, he gets twenty-five dollars for it. That's the regular fee."

"Some things can't be paid for in money."

"I hear the patient promised the doctor a hat if the transfusion's successful," put in another girl.

"Yeah!" agreed Betsy. "He's got a secondhand clothing store on Orchard Street!"

"Honest, Betsy?" screamed the other girls, and she nodded. Not much of the world's business eluded this girl. "He'll take it out of stock."

"They say the doctor doesn't need it. He's doing the thing for nothing because the old-clothes man can't afford to pay."

"Who is he?" questioned Nina innocently, believing there was a man on the visiting staff competent to handle the case.

Betsy's eyes bored into Nina. Her lips curled slightly with the air of one about to dramatize herself before the mob. "Doctor Judson Penning of Victory Hospital. They say he's always glad to get transfusions. Is that so, Nina?"

In the silence broken only by the snickers of these girls who had baited her, Nina tried desperately to control the hot blood that rushed to her cheeks. When she mastered the lump in her throat, she said:

"What would I know about it?"

"Aren't you a relation of his?" challenged Betsy.

"I?" parried Nina.

The other's eyes widened in mock surprise. "Didn't you tell me you were related to him by marriage? Why, who could have told me?" And turning to the girl beside her, "Isabel, did you say that? Or was it Gladys? Now, who could have told me?" She screwed up her face in pretended concern, but her ruse was of no avail.

"I watched a transfusion once," Nina said. "And I have my afternoon off. You don't catch me staying in any operating room with the doors and windows sealed."

XXVIII

Nina was proud of her strength. It would have been so simple to stay indoors and wait for a glimpse of Jude. There were numerous angles from which she might see him without being seen. She could think of him without bitterness, and for that reason did not trust herself in his presence. Life moved tranquilly in deep channels which must not be diverted.

After lunch she dressed and resolutely set off for her appointment. Stirred always by the mystery of ritual and the rule of cloistered places, Nina had vague plans for entering an order of nursing sisters. She was going to find out whether she would have to become a convert to Catholicism, what renunciations she might have to make, whether she would have to take the veil for eternity.

Upon her return she heard that Doctor Penning was to get his hat. She smiled inwardly at the jocose speculation as to the original ownership of the hat. Would the band bear the King of England's or the President's initials, or merely those of some common millionaire, from whose junk heap the patient bought his stock? Only Nina knew that whatever the nature of the gift, Doctor Penning would receive it with grace and gratitude. And if the patient forgot — as they often do after the doctor's work is done — that would not disturb Jude's equanimity, either.

Vacation time fell, not at the end of semesters, but at

the end of each twelvemonth. This year, in September, Nina's vacation in the midst of her senior term proved to be a postman's holiday. Thomas Wyndram had at last achieved an illness which warranted hospital care, and Nina visited him almost daily. She had not forgotten how Mary used to do the heavy cleaning for her niece on her days out, or how Jude in a spare hour read another journal of surgery. She understood. She rather enjoyed going to another institution, talking with the nurses on terms of equality, and mentally comparing notes.

When she paid her first visit to Central Hospital, Nina was astonished to find Uncle Thomas in a public ward, where the maximum fee was two dollars per day. Since the disillusionment over Kane, all Nina's friends had been subjected to a revaluation, and Thomas Wyndram had not benefited by the process. Though several years before, she would have shared his misery at incarceration in a twenty-bed ward, now she scolded him roundly for occupying a bed which might be needed for a poor patient.

"You ought to be in a private room," she said. "Or at least a semi-private."

"The charges are ridiculous, my dear Nina. And the laboratory fees they put upon a private patient! I assure you, many of the orders left for the laboratory are quite unnecessary and do not throw one ray of light upon my case."

Nina agreed that there was probably some laboratory fakery, but might not the particular blood test or culture or whatever it was be of scientific interest to the doctor?

"Not at my expense, my dear Nina."

"I'd have borrowed the money from Mother, if you'd let me know."

"You missed her by five minutes. She paid me her respects. I have quite an adequate bank account, but one must be prepared for the proverbial rainy day."

"Isn't illness a rainy day?" gasped Nina.

The professor in striped pajamas glared at her through his spectacles. Obviously he did not think so. He began to tell her the details of his illness, apparently caused by eating shrimps, but really dating back to pneumonia at twenty-five, to a broken arm at sixteen, to measles, scarlet fever, diphtheria, and earache in childhood. No longer could Nina sigh when he sighed, wince when he winced, or suffer with him. She had seen too much of genuine pain, of mute suffering. She saw that he had a slight attack of ptomaine and was now well enough to go home.

"I doubt whether you have had such a case as mine in the whole history of your hospital," he said.

The man in the next bed had been ringing for a drink of water for some ten minutes. Nina got up to give it to him. She knew that most nurses did not mind if a visitor helped a patient. Uncle Thomas waited impatiently.

"That man is a nuisance," he said. "His demands are continuous. I tell you, Nina, I suffered reactions and reported clinical facts which that nurse never entered upon the chart."

"Why how do you know, Uncle Thomas? You don't see the chart. That's unfair."

"I know by the speed with which she completes her entries. And by the flippant look in her eyes as I talk to her. I trust you will not make a flippant nurse, Nina. Now do you see the truth of my contention?" He drew a watch out of the breast pocket of his pajama coat. "Three

minutes have passed since the time when she was to have taken my pulse. And she is not here. Will you be good enough to take it for me? Then I shall take it myself while you hold the watch. It is wise to check results."

"I can't do that, Uncle Thomas."

"Can't take pulse?"

"Not yours. You see I'm not on the case. I can't infringe on your nurse's precincts. And besides, I must not make her feel that I mistrust her."

"I have noticed," he said in an aggrieved voice, "that doctors and nurses always protect each other."

Once, on her way to the hospital, Nina was moved by some impulse to walk past the house where she was born. A small placard in the front window announced an apartment for rent. Nina regretted the second impulse which prompted her to ring the bell, but she heard somebody running downstairs, and it was too late to withdraw. This was the bell her father's patients had rung any hour of the day or night, and in this fashion, too, they had stood waiting for the sound of Mary's footsteps on the stairs. She said she wanted to look at the apartment. Caught inwardly by a trembling network of emotions, Nina followed the very suave woman who opened the door. Instantly all fear and sadness dropped from her. Everything was changed.

The hall bench was replaced by a small gilded table, and two gaudy gilt chairs. On the table stood a bowl of artificial flowers. While Nina was noting these details, a woman in mannish clothes came down with an escort of two black spaniels. From under her lashes she looked out boldly at Nina and almost winked. Indeed, Nina was not quite sure that the one eyelid did not move. Receiving no

response, she whistled to her dogs and strode out. Nina wondered which rooms she occupied.

What had been Doctor Wyndram's waiting room and office comprised the unoccupied apartment. Nina examined them with a complete indifference. Had they borne any resemblance to their former state, she might have been agitated. The wainscoting had been done over in white and the doors in mahogany. A piano such as Nina had read about but never seen — olive green with elaborate Watteau figures painted on the sides and top — filled one corner. Bright, lacquered "arty" furniture crowded this front room. The inner one, the bedroom, was a fright of gold lace and furbelows. The rental demanded would have paid the expenses of the whole house for a month under Julia's management.

Nina was not sorry she had yielded to her whim. She could still preserve the old picture which bore no relation to the new. In crisscrossing her way in and out of the streets of the neighborhood, she reflected on the passing of the old wooden, black-and-gold doctors' signs, swinging at the ends of iron rods and informing the passer-by of the doctor's office hours. Occasionally, one saw a neat, inconspicuous, black-and-white glass sign like Jude's, with nothing but a name on it. Physicians were working more and more by appointment. Most of them, even the beginners, had few unexpected callers in their offices. They were working in specialty groups, and establishing suites in buildings for physicians.

Nina's work during the remaining months of her course continued to absorb her attention. Evenings, when she refurbished her clothes, for she had bought no new apparel except shoes, and was trying to make these last, she busied

herself with the problem of the future. Many fields were open — public nursing, private practice, institutional nursing, office work with a physician. She had definitely ruled out the nursing sisters, after talking to the Mother Superior.

She toyed, too, with the idea of studying medicine at some future date. A newly appointed woman interne discouraged Nina. Everybody liked this Doctor Jessie Aldrich; she was so helpful and considerate of the nurses. Never a sharp order or a public reproof from her. She was a tall, clear-eyed young woman, with sturdy ankles, strong arms and wrists, and quick powers of recuperation.

"Not with your physique," she said to Nina. "It's a hard pull through college and a harder pull after. There are two classes of people who won't patronize a woman physician. One class is — men, and the other — women."

"It doesn't have to be private practice. How about research, or community work? And then there are always the children," Nina laughed.

"Yes," agreed Doctor Aldrich, "the children. Pediatrics is a fine field for woman. But a specialty takes money. And lots of it."

Everywhere Nina heard the same cry — money, money, money. Money to open an office, money to tide a young practitioner over the first barren years, money to specialize, money for additional courses at universities where great men lectured. Money, money, money! Some of the men looked for rich wives as a solution. Others sought frantically for means of supporting poor wives. A couple of internes with the Oath of Hippocrates fresh on their lips announced their intention of starting right off with illegal practice. That would give them enough money to

"go straight," they said jocularly, after five years. Another, engaged to be married to a nurse, was "going into confinements." A friend of his and his wife, also a nurse, handled a thousand births a year in a workmen's neighborhood, and they expected to retire wealthy in ten years. A number contemplated contract work with insurance companies and factories, in this way hoping to cover the overhead. Some already accepted dollar bills from ward patients, and she knew one to have been heavily fined for hinting at a fee from an ambulance case he had brought in.

But there were several like those in the group Dion O'Connor dominated, who seemed gloriously free from that financial care, not because they had money, but because they refused to consider it of paramount importance. With eyes fixed steadily on the main road, they were the ones who would replace Drake and Wexler and Jevons, when these latter gods dropped out of the relay.

At the commencement exercises, in April, when Nina went up for her diploma, she received a round of applause from the staff, the hospital directors, and the school directors which quite startled her. Julia, who had managed to come to this function, took Nina to lunch afterward.

"Now that you've had your fling," she said to her daughter, "how about making a slight effort to get your husband back?"

"I don't know what you mean by having a fling, Mother. I haven't begun to do anything. And I don't want to see Jude or hear his voice. There's no special reason why I should — now."

"You mean you're going out to work now? You'll leave

all that money and ease behind? There's no insanity in my family. You must have got it from your father."

Since she had not yet decided what to do, Nina thought she would stay at the hospital for another week. If they cared to, recent graduates might be guests of the staff for that length of time. Three days after Nina was privileged to sign the letters "R. N." after her name, she was thrust into a decision.

Doctor Philip Drake's secretary, talking to Mrs. Dunn over the telephone, called for a nurse to assist in a case with two other nurses already on duty. This additional service would be required for only a few hours, but could Mrs. Dunn send somebody at once. Mrs. Dunn, ever eager to send prize pupils out to make a reputation, said she would send a young woman who had taken honors in operating-room technique. Doctor Drake's secretary thought that would be splendid. A few moments of conversation ensued, and then Nina got the summons.

With her uniform in the overnight bag she had once carried to Kane Ruyter's, Nina left the dormitory for her first case. Pride and uncertainty struggled to make her nervous. The name and address she had been given were puzzling. Possibly there were two men in the city of that name. It might not be an uncommon one.

XXIX

Alberto Bianchi, the great tenor, lay very ill. For years his voice had thrilled humanity to joy. For years his tender tones had wrung humanity's heart to tears. Many had sought to imitate him and had failed. Others had dreamed of surpassing him and were already forgotten.

Immortal of voice, yet was his body mortal, and now he lay dying, in a carved and canopied bed which had once been the property of an Italian prince. At his right, sat a son of his first marriage, a silent, frightened youth taken unaware by his father's collapse. At the left sat the tenor's second wife, a young American heiress, shaken from her habitual aloofness at the prospect of her famous husband's death. Only three others were in the room where twenty might have congregated with ease. In a shadowed corner, with arms folded and eyes lowered, a priest was offering silent prayers for the recovery of his benefactor. White-capped, at attention, two nurses stood against the wall at a respectful distance, that the members of the patient's family might have these few moments alone with him.

Into this scene Nina stepped. Before she had changed her clothes in the luxurious room indicated by a maid, she had known she would see the great man. She should have been certain of it when she read his name on Mrs. Dunn's slip. Had it not been through Doctor Drake that Signor Bianchi had come to Jude? And Doctor Drake had put in

the call now. Nina bowed to Mrs. Bianchi and spoke a stiff professional greeting to the patient. Nina had seen pictures of the jolly face on the pillow. She had listened to phonograph records of this man's voice, shivering to the ecstasy of his sharp notes and waiting breathlessly for that sobbing catch in his throat. As a child, she had on one remembered occasion been taken to the opera to hear him. Now, he smiled up at her and whispered a request for her name.

"Miss Wyndram," said his wife, and he was satisfied.

Silence settled over the room, lurking in corners, hanging heavily over the canopied bed, enveloping the priest at his devotions. Only Alberto Bianchi himself broke the silence, and then a faint rustling pervaded the air, as everybody strained forward to catch his words. He alone had the courage to joke about his condition, to fashion the inimitable jests which the newspapers quoted, to turn those bantering quips which brought faint smiles from the watchers at his bedside.

At intervals, a nursemaid appeared with the singer's infant daughter, a little rosebud of a baby with pink ribbons for petals and lace for leaves. Joyously the child responded to her father's drollery, the father who would be to her only a golden glory of tradition. But when the patient showed signs of weakness, Miss Belnord, the nurse with the glasses, would order the baby to be taken out.

"You jailer!" Bianchi laughed. "Bring me a pencil, Miss Belnord. I will draw a caricature of you — with a gun on your shoulder."

And everybody smiled. Even the priest raised his black, burning eyes for a second. That is, everybody smiled but Nina. She had taken her place against the wall beside

Miss Belnord and Mrs. Carl, and her manner was a trifle stiffer, a trifle more unbending than theirs. It was not that approaching death frightened her. Nor did the thought that Jude had deprived her of a personal meeting with this man produce the grave expression in her face. This was Nina's first case, and she erred on the side of professional dignity.

In a reception room at the other end of the suite, Doctor Drake was in consultation with a surgeon, Mrs. Carl told her softly. Outside in the hall, reporters waited for the result of the consultation. Silence closed down again on the sick room. People in the street walked softly. Cars rolled quietly. By the order of the police department, horses and trucks were diverted into the next avenue. The great Bianchi lay dying, and the city hushed its activity in his honor.

Nina did not think Doctor Drake would recognize her now. Jude himself had once passed her in the hall, because he was engrossed in his work. Surely Doctor Drake, who had not met her for several years and would not be expecting to find her here, might be counted on to regard her as a stranger.

Presently the door opened and he entered, talking to a man whose face Nina could not see. Her blood quickened. Doctor Drake appeared just as she remembered him. He had an odd, broad face which tapered down into a pointed beard, yellow eyes, heavy black eyebrows, red, full lips. Behind these two walked a young red-haired giant in shabby clothes. He was obviously embarrassed to the point of paralysis. When the men halted at the bed and separated, Nina got a full view of the third, the one to whom Doctor Drake was talking. It was Jude.

A terrible heat stung through Nina's veins. A mad, wild fire sent its tongues licking upward until she thought her uniform must be aflame. She stood near an open window but she felt stifled. She had been right, a thousand times right, in not going to talk things over, as he had requested, if this was what the mere sight of him did to her.

The men had not so much as glanced at the battery of nurses. Jude's eyes held that old familiar look, that look of vacuity for all interests but the one at hand. Doctor Drake was explaining to Bianchi that they had decided on a transfusion, and that it had been his idea to call for donors among the students to whom he lectured, who would appreciate the honor. Miss Belnord and Mrs. Carl exchanged an appreciative glance. Mrs. Bianchi raised large, wistful eyes to the red-haired giant. Nina bit her lips. She dug her nails into her palms. If only they had told her that a transfusion might be the next step! All eyes were centered on the patient.

"There was a rush," Doctor Drake said. "Twenty boys offered themselves. But young McBride here won out."

Bianchi regarded the tall powerful figure of the student who was willing to undergo discomfort for a great cause. A warm, affectionate look stole into the great man's eyes. "The world — it is full of unselfish people," he said. "But tell me, Doctor, what will happen when the blood of Ireland mixes with the blood of Italy? Poof — perhaps an explosion. Eh?"

He rested after his pantomime of an explosion. Then he continued, "It is perhaps an insult to mention reward. But — rest assured — " Here his voice trailed off. His eyes sought his wife's in confirmation, and she nodded,

as if to assure him that, whatever the outcome, he would count on her to do the handsome thing.

The donor bowed awkwardly, but the smooth words he spoke hinted of a prepared speech. "The only reward I want, Mrs. Bianchi, is to be able to say that my blood restored your husband to health. I would give my life for him, if necessary."

"Of course you would," she agreed, as one to whom no homage came unexpectedly.

"A prayer for our rescuer," whispered the tenor. The request was repeated to the priest, and presently a prayer went up for mercy.

With curious clarity, Nina followed two trains of thought. Distinctly she heard and made mental note of all that was passing. Desperately she sought control of her faculties to meet the next shock. Doctor Drake pulled a stethoscope out of his pocket and set it against the singer's heart. Doctor Penning lifted his head and gazed at the spot where the three women stood.

"Has the new nurse come?" he asked.

Miss Belnord, officially in charge, answered, "Yes, Doctor Penning. Here she is. Miss Wyndram."

He had not waited for her to mention the name. When she said "Yes," he had himself looked to see which of the two faces he had not seen during his earlier visit. Once he had passed Nina without recognizing her, in their own home. But not now, not now. He drew a sharp breath, and a dull, painful red spread over his forehead and temples. None in the room seemed to have observed his reaction; none seemed to have heard the impact. To Jude, it was as if, in a great crowd, he had collided with Nina. Out of a dozen people, out of mobs, he had come face to face with

her. For Nina, they had run against a glass barrier which, in the sharp silence of souls, had fallen in clanging fragments about them — cutting, tearing, bruising.

"Miss Wyndram," said Jude formally, and Nina fancied herself back in Doctor Slater's laboratory on the day he first pronounced the name.

Doctor Drake's voice broke in on them. "I want to talk to you, Doctor Penning."

The two men strolled toward the door, young McBride after them. Before he stepped out, Jude turned his head the fraction of an inch and stared at Nina. The flush had not receded from his temples. At the closing of the door Nina glanced at her watch. Their meeting had consumed no more time than a dream, but, as in a dream, one moment had encompassed a period of two and a half years.

Again the room was steeped in stillness. Great waves of silence seemed to have been released from hidden caves, and with the swell of the current, all sounds in the room were deadened. Under the spell of this repose, artificial though it was, Nina's numbness began to wear away. Occasionally Miss Belnord would change the position of a pillow, take the patient's temperature or his pulse. Or now and then Mrs. Carl disappeared to return with small quantities of liquid nourishment. Bianchi was weakened by many weeks of pleurisy and pneumonia and relapses into both conditions; and every spoonful of food, in this state, might mean another hour of life.

Nina took no part in this slight activity. She was needed only for the transfusion, and she wished they might begin preparations soon. In attention to detail, perhaps she would find surcease from the broader sweep of mental confusion. This was no time for personal reflection. In-

deed, the tenor's buoyancy in the face of eternal oblivion put her to shame. Once he made an inquiry about a trivial incident of his son's life at school. The lad tried to answer, but could not. Again, the patient drummed on the bedcover, as if beating time to an inward tune which his voice could no longer reproduce. Was it the song Jude had whistled on the day Alberto Bianchi had visited the office? Nina followed the rhythmic rise and fall of his fingers, but she could not identify the melody from the beats.

Mrs. Bianchi had left the room. Soon she returned to tell her husband that a member of the opera was outside, begging to see him. His eyes sparkled, but Miss Belnord must decide for him, and he hung on her words with childlike eagerness.

"Just for five minutes," she conceded.

There entered a man who might have been the greatest living tenor, had he been born in another generation. Both men showed undisguised pleasure at this brief reunion, and after they had exchanged greetings in their native tongue, the visitor tiptoed clumsily over to Miss Belnord.

"He wishes me to sing for him. Is it allowed?"

"If it's a song that won't excite him."

Informally leaning against a bedpost, the pretender to Alberto Bianchi's crown delivered the song, a fisherman's ultimatum to his love. It was as if this man merely stood there, talking to his friend, telling him the story of the young fisherman who would no longer tolerate his love's deceit, but talking with more color and joy and pain than ordinary people may divulge in their speech.

The lyric possessed that haunting poignancy of all folk music. In the swing and cadence of it could be heard the

dip of oars, the scraping of the nets against the side of the boat as the haul was dragged in by powerful, rhythmic strokes.

Cannetella, oje Cannetella, Cannetella, Cannetè!

Each verse swelled into the chorus, which was half sung, half shouted in the shrill, voluptuous, throaty tones of a man calling above the roar of the sea.

Cannetella, oje Cannetella, Cannetella, Cannetè!

The last verse, the prophecy of the young fisherman that his love's failure to choose between him and the other man would terminate in conflict, mounted in fervor, and the singer's voice took on a new note of impassioned pleading.

Con chiù dimmo gioja mia
O songh' io oè chillo IIà.
se nun sciglie a chi te piglie,
quanto sango scorrarrà!
Cannetella, oje Cannetella, Cannetella, Cannetè!

Glancing away from the man at the foot of the bed, Nina saw Jude standing in the doorway. He waited until Bianchi lifted his hands to applaud. Then he said:

"I'm ready for you, Miss Wyndram."

XXX

Reality claimed Nina. Out in the hall, she and Jude had a moment alone. They stood a foot apart, he feeling the change in her, but knowing naught of its mysterious origin. Both had had time to adjust themselves.

"Do you want to go through with it?" he said.

"I'm on duty."

"I can relieve you."

"Will you be disturbed if I am around?"

"Oh, no."

"If you can do it, I am sure I can."

Their first conversation after two and a half years struck Nina as odd, ironic. On second thought, perhaps it was not so odd. Perhaps they were meeting on a common basis for the first time. Together they walked into another room, where a maid, the housekeeper, and a chauffeur awaited the doctor's orders. There was a variety of equipment required for an operation in a private home, and a staff of servants was at Jude's disposal.

Nina had never seen Jude walk in that jerky, sharp fashion, as if not a step, or a movement must be wasted. She had never seen him, the real Jude, at all, she thought suddenly, but only the left-overs in his eyes. She was going to know him at last. And if he were interested, he might know the real Nina. Here she stood.

"Want a pencil to make a list?" he asked.

The chauffeur stepped forward with a pencil and pad.

"No," said Nina. "I'll remember everything you say. I don't use lists."

He shot her a queer look and began to talk his orders in a steady stream. Here and there Nina forestalled and surprised him by mentioning a piece of apparatus. The three servants stood at more than a respectful distance, bowing to the doctor every time he addressed them and regarding him with eyes widened by awe. To them, Nina was only one of their own class. Jude, however, was a god second to none, for he had been designated by Doctor Drake to infuse new life into the great Bianchi.

Immediately the sick room became the scene of hurried though noiseless activity. Only the nurses were permitted to remain. One chauffeur was dispatched to the druggist's, another to a hospital supply house. A hotel bellboy handed in a pillar of white towels. Word went out to the press that a young medical student would shortly give his blood to prolong the days of Alberto Bianchi, and that Doctor Judson Penning would effect the transfusion. Anxiously the world hung on the newspaper headlines for the result.

Presently the messengers began to return. From black cases Nina unpacked sterile instruments, each in its own sterile glass tube, especially put up for extra-hospital use. A wheeled stretcher was placed beside the bed. A white metal table was brought from the kitchen, and after scrubbing it off with disinfectant, Nina began to arrange groups of articles on it. Hypodermic needles on a bed of cotton, rolls of bandage in a glass-covered jar, a supply of stimulants, gauze squares. Systematically she followed Jude's numerous instructions. A length of glass tubing, a clamp, a bottle of saline. The last would have to wait until the

chauffeur returned from Doctor Slater's with fresh distilled water.

Through all these preparations, Nina's fingers moved swiftly, and although she did not catch Jude watching her, she felt she was under surveillance. He was too much the physician, always, to permit his eyes to stray in her direction. She knew he saw everything with an inner consciousness. The nervous strain on her was terrific, but never would it be said that her hands had fumbled or her memory lapsed in the presence of Doctor Penning.

Truly she had not met the real Judson Penning before. In the course of her whole life she had not seen such deference, such honor, paid to any man as was shown to him. It was Doctor Penning here and there and everywhere, while she, his wife, was merely a white shadow which moved at his bidding. On the other hand, he himself seemed to be the white shadow of some greater personality. He wore concealed armor in protection against this deference and honor. Scarce raising his eyes, he kept at the task — he was setting up the actual apparatus by which strength was to be conveyed from one body to another — as if he, too, labored under another's instructions. At intervals, he called for things quietly and Nina put them into his outstretched hand, taking care that their fingers did not touch.

Clad in a long surgeon's gown, with the left sleeve removed, young McBride, the donor, entered. He looked so strong and powerful, Nina thought Bianchi must be deriving health from the very sight of him.

"Stretcher just a little closer to the bed, Miss Wyndram," said Jude.

The donor started forward to help her.

"Sit down," snapped the doctor. "Trying to raise your heart beat?"

Jude stethoscoped the patient for the last time and Nina recorded the findings on the special chart, along with a few pertinent remarks he made. Nina disinfected her hands for the last time and donned rubber gloves. Thus protected, she could assist Jude with his. There had always been something helpless, to her, in the sight of a doctor standing with hands in mid-air, waiting for the nurse to hand him his gloves. Jude's arms were extended, his palms turned up with a look of supplication about them. Or was it only her imagination? With sterile forceps, she held the gloves and he wiggled into them.

Like a small, trained army, the staff of nurses marched to its strategic posts, Miss Belnord to time the patient's pulse, Mrs. Carl, the donor's, while Nina aided the doctor with ligatures. From that point, the stages of the transfusion went with precision.

Nina told herself she must remember to look the facts up in a book. Was it humanly possible for a man so ill as Bianchi to rally during the course of the transfusion? Or did she only imagine the return of a healthy expression to the patient's eye, of a tinge of color to his cheeks, of a thrill of vitality that seemed to pass visibly from donor to patient? Or had the mere thought of an infusion of new strength caused the patient to brighten?

Already Nina could see the headlines screaming across the newspapers. There would be dramatic accounts of the tenor's recovery, along with his picture, and McBride's, and probably Jude's. Much would be made of Doctor Judson Penning, the miracle worker, but never would any one know that his wife had been in the room

with him. That was as it should be. She had done very little. No doubt doctors in small towns and waste places performed such miracles without trained nurses to help them.

The process is calculated down to the last drop of blood. When the last drop had passed successfully into the body and blood of Alberto Bianchi, the red-haired giant swung himself off the wheeled cot on which he had lain and stretched his muscles. Though he showed not a sign of weakness, and obviously required no assistance, Nina followed him. Jude came behind them. The instant she opened the door, the priest glided out of the shadows. He had been praying there all the time, and now his dark, shining eyes scrutinized the three faces. From nowhere appeared Mrs. Bianchi, pale but composed. At a distance, the singer's son stood flattened against the wall.

"He came through nicely," Jude told them, "and is as well as can be expected. It is too soon to say what permanent good this has done. You may go in, but no excitement, if you please. Now I should like to telephone to Doctor Drake."

The young wife motioned to a passing maid. "Nanette will show you to a telephone," she said. "And then I shall want to talk to you, Doctor Penning, if you have time to spare. And you too, Mr. McBride."

She passed them and entered the room. Not a word did Jude say to Nina, not a "Good day," or "I'm glad we met," or "Where will you be living now?" Not a word. Not a glance. He turned and followed the maid who would show him to a telephone.

Timothy McBride, first-year medical student, gazed after him in admiration. "He's pretty young, isn't he?"

he remarked to Nina. "Darn young to be called in on front-page cases like this."

And before Nina realized whither her tongue might lead her, she answered, "He's thirty-four."

"He looks older than that. But even if he's thirty-eight — that's young. Generally you've got to have burnsides and a polished dome before you get anywhere."

The maid returned. Would Mr. McBride see the gentlemen of the press? Mr. McBride was fair-skinned and colored deeply as he turned to Nina.

"If you'd be ready when I am, we might — "

"I won't be," said Nina sternly.

Nina had only to get the room cleared of the apparatus, and see that it was all safely on its way back to the places from which it had been hired. She passed to and fro, prepared to meet Jude at any moment. An hour had passed when, returning to Signor Bianchi's room, she found Doctor Drake at the bedside. Had Jude gone? She was two hours in setting things to rights, and not having come upon Jude once, she concluded that he had left.

Hurriedly Nina changed back into street clothes. She was floundering around in the maze of halls when a man who might have been a secretary stopped her. He wanted her address. There would be a check for her services. Somewhat taken aback, she had not given a thought to this angle of the day's events, Nina unthinkingly gave the old Riverside Drive address. Instantly she perceived her error. She could not correct her statement without arousing suspicion. The secretary escorted her to the private elevator which operated only for this suite.

Nina decided she would call Jude on the telephone to tell him that the check would be mailed to his address.

No, not that. Better to write him a formal note. She did not want to talk to him. Still, it might be interesting to hear his reaction at the sound of her voice. Her heart ached, and she was provoked that Jude should have gone away without a sign, without a word. But why should he have spoken to her? Had she not ignored his letters, his implications of peace overtures? He thought she was done with him, and he was judging her by himself. When *he* was done — he was done.

And yet because hope was lodged so queerly in that lump in her throat, she exhibited no surprise when Jude rose from a chair in the lobby just as she stepped out of the elevator. All too plainly he showed what she had done to him. That he, Judson Penning, should wait around two hours to see her! A wild desire to play with him seized her. By a word, a look, a movement, she would make the telltale scarlet on his temples recede or advance, as she chose.

He took her bag, cupped his hand under her elbow, and led her out a side door. "I want to talk to you," he said, and hailed a taxi. Nina pretended not to hear the address he gave the driver. She was not going to tell him yet that she had left the same address with Signor Bianchi's secretary. Not yet.

In the taxi, he faced her. He looked older. His cheek bones were more prominent. His heart stared out of his eyes. She did not want him to see the imprint this meeting had left upon her.

"You asked Doctor Drake to send for me," she teased. "Didn't you?"

"I never would have thought of it. I didn't want to force a meeting. You know that."

"Honest Injun?"

"Drake didn't recognize you. I doubt whether he saw you."

Nina glanced out of the window. "Drop me off a block away from the hospital. I don't want them to see me drive up in a taxi."

"Won't you come back with me?"

"Back?"

"Home."

Desperately Nina tried to remember why she had run away. A list of her grievances would now help her to resist him. She recalled the tangible incidents which led up to their break, but what was there inside, in the nucleus of her being, which had impelled her to revolt? That spot in the nucleus would be her reason to Jude for continuance of their separation. But what was it? It eluded her. The instant she glimpsed it, the thing vanished. Perhaps it had not existed. No, the attendant circumstances had been too real to have found root in the imagination.

She did not answer. Street lights began to appear along their route. It was growing dark. She had known that some day he would ask her to return. But there was Kane. What would they do about Kane? Kane was his friend. She would have to tell him about Kane.

He leaned over and took her unresisting hands. Jude could scarcely see her face, but he heard her draw a sharp breath.

"There was so little to remember, Nina. We weren't like other couples, with a long courtship and voluminous correspondence, and photographs and trifles and mementos. There were just a few notes from Canada, a sketch that Bernice did of you, a cheap little snapshot — "

Nina pretended her thoughts were elsewhere. "Is that the hat the old-clothes man gave you?" she chuckled, gazing up at the really fine velours he wore.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"There was a lot of joking about it at the hospital. I might have been at the transfusion — if I had wanted to."

"I looked for your face."

"Did you?"

"Later I realized it was better for you to finish your course before I spoke to you. If you had your heart set on the work — "

"I wouldn't have given up the course for worlds. It's changed me."

"Yes, you're changed. I don't know how. But you're changed."

There was Kane. What should she do about Kane?

The old spell of proximity enmeshed her. As in other days, the flash of his words revealed to her the greatness of other worlds. His arguments were always logical, correct, weighty, when he sat opposite her and warmed her with his gaze. Now, too, she had fewer limitations to transcend. In this one day, she had glimpsed more of the vaulted beauty of his heaven than, before her training at the hospital, she might have seen in years.

"We didn't give our marriage a chance, Nina."

"Perhaps not."

"Why couldn't we have considered this just a lovers' quarrel? If we hadn't been married, we'd have made up the next day, I'm sure, as all lovers do in courting time."

It was a pretty exclamation, and appealed to her. Nina

wondered whether she would ever have left Jude had Kane not been ready to open his door to her. Lovers' quarrel. This might be their real marriage now.

The taxi stopped. Even before she saw the little limestone balcony outside the bedroom window, Nina sensed that he had not taken her back to the hospital. If she entered the house, her decision would be final. She longed to defer the final moment. Jude must not know that her blood leaped at the familiar sight of the stone flower tubs at the front door. She stiffened. Jude took the little bag with her nurses' uniform in it, the one marked "N. W. P." which she had carried to Kane.

"Come, Nina."

For a moment, she hedged, first turning to look at the Hudson unrolled before their front door. Like the lining of a sea shell rolled flat, all rose, and orange, and mother-of-pearl, it stretched away into the skyline.

Jude opened the house with his latchkey. He gave her a gentle shove, and she was inside. The office staff had gone home. Jude snapped on lights in the gay waiting room and drew Nina in. He put her into a chair. Then he drew off her gloves. Then he lifted her hat from her head, rumpling her curls in the process.

"And yet — " Nina said aloud, following a subconscious train of thought, "you went ahead without me. You've made long strides in your profession."

"That's something I can't help, Nina. It drives me from within. I'd have to fight ahead, if the whole world were against me. Nobody can kill that thing inside me. I can't let it be killed. But at my age — " he broke off, "I don't know how you feel. You're only twenty-one. I'm thirty-four. The prospect of going through life without a com-

panion isn't very attractive. Even though I have made mistakes."

Nina's heart stirred happily. Once she had been flattered by the thought that this self-sufficient man wanted to marry her. He was even more self-sufficient than she had dreamed, but again the thought of being necessary to him pleased her. She possessed power over him, power to make him lonely, power to make his eyes tender or gay, power to make him sad, power to leave him as she had left Kane — with head bowed. She knew how to wield it now.

She would not tell him that she did not like the thought of the lonely years either, just because she was twenty-one. The world was a twosome planet, bee to pollen, pollen to ovule, man to woman, husband to wife. She remembered the sight in Kane's microscope — even those monocells had sought consummation.

Nina began to cry softly, as one bewildered, with tears half of laughter, half of relief. Jude took her into his arms. Man to woman —

But what of the third? What of Kane?

Nina said nothing about him. She wondered whether Jude suspected. Yet Jude, suspecting strongly, did not ask where Nina had gone the night of the fête. Would Nina ever tell him? He did not care. Were his suspicions correct, he must then take a decisive stand on the question.

Here was a problem Judson Penning did not wish to face. As he drew Nina closer, there was born within him a pious hope that she would never feel constrained, through some need for abnegation, to tell him the truth about her friendship with Kane.

"There's that trip we never had, Nina. We'll go away together — somewhere — "

The telephone rang. The sudden, sharp sound sent a living shock through Nina, almost as if she had held her hand upon the bell at the moment of its ringing.

"I won't go," Jude said slowly.

They stared at each other. "Won't go where?" Nina asked. "On a trip?"

Jude jerked his head toward the telephone. "That must be a call. I won't take it."

Nina passed her hand over her eyes. "A call? Oh — oh, yes. A call. But the 'phone has to be answered!"

He did not recall how Nina got to the desk before him. He thought she gave him a slight push; and there she was, talking.

"Doctor Penning's office. Yes — he is."

He plucked at her sleeve. "I won't take it, I tell you."

"Who is it? The name, please? And the address?" she was calm, incredibly so. Jude snatched the telephone pad out of her reach.

"Oh! The hospital. I see. Of course, he'll be right over." Nina faced him, smiling.

"What did you do that for?" he demanded gruffly. "Why did you tell them I'd be right over."

"Force of habit, I suppose," she said, an odd note in her voice. "Perhaps I never got over being a doctor's wife."

"But I want to stay here with you, Nina."

"You really do?"

"You've just come back!"

"It's a Mrs. Phipps. They think her condition is getting rapidly worse."

Jude spoke impatiently. "The house physician knows what to do for her. Call them back. Please, Nina. Tell them

anything. Say I can't come. Ask to talk to Doctor Rose and tell him — "

Nina started for the alcove. Jude didn't understand why, but he followed her, talking all the time.

At last she interrupted. "I want you to go, Jude."

"You want me to go?" he cried.

"Yes."

"Why, Nina!"

"Oh, I know, I know. Don't say it!" This was her only approach to hysteria in the whole course of the trying conversation. "It used to be that those calls came between us. I know. Don't let's go over it all now. Let's not talk now, Jude. It's different. I want you to go."

He seized her by the shoulders. She said, "You'll do it for me?"

"But you'll be here when I come back?"

So easily he yielded, so naturally he slipped into the old groove. Yes, a force stronger than his own will, a force over which he had no control, was driving him from within.

"I'll be waiting," she promised, turning away.

"And no calls to-night, Nina. If anything comes in, I'm busy. To-night is yours."

He caught her about the waist. She eluded him, taking his coat from the peg in the alcove. With an air of excitement she helped him into it.

Jude regarded her with wonder. Nina took advantage of his docility to slap his hat on his head. He laughed at his reflection in the diamond-shaped mirror. The hat was tilted at a humorous angle.

But Nina didn't laugh. She couldn't. She had wanted him to go; he was going. Why couldn't she smile?

Arm in arm, with Jude still laughing and exclaiming his happiness over her presence, they walked to the door. Rather, Nina marched him to the door, hustled him, bustled about him, turning down his collar, straightening his tie. Then she handed him his bag.

"Won't need it, child. I'm going to the hospital."

"Better take it," she said. "You might want your own instruments. You never can tell."

"Very well, Nurse. You're the director of *this* institution from now on!" He really believed that.

She swung open the grilled door, using both hands to do so. Jude bent to kiss her, and in that kiss she glimpsed the years ahead. Just a brushing of her cheek with his lips, because his body was already in motion, in forward motion toward the outer door. Once he was going, he was eager to get away.

From the window, Nina watched him turn the corner. She saw him hail a taxi, give the driver directions. Then her heart began to pound and expectantly she leaned out.

But Jude got into the cab and slammed the door. The vehicle turned the corner.

Jude had not looked back. Not even to wave, or to smile. He was off on a case.

THE END

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